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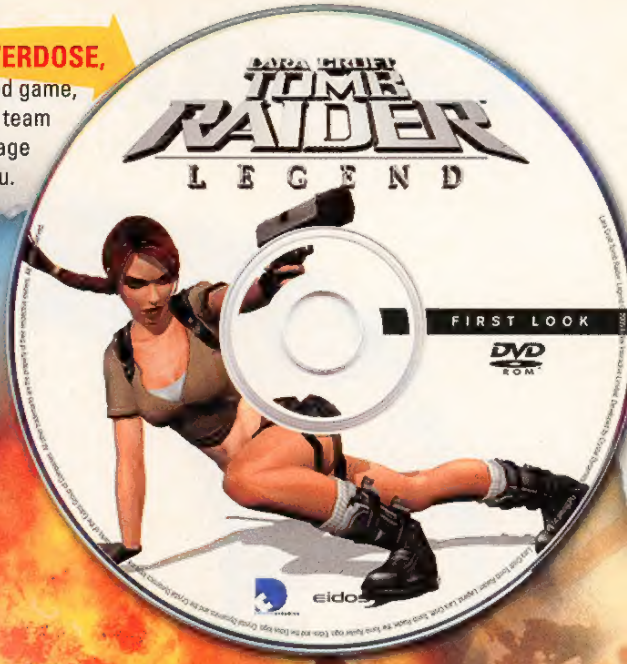

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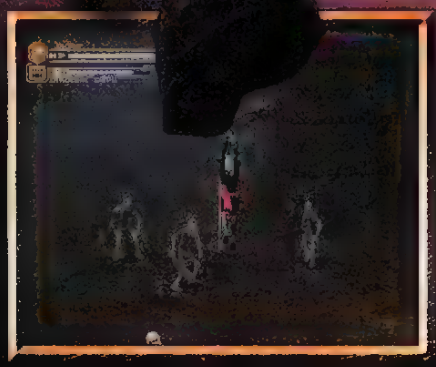

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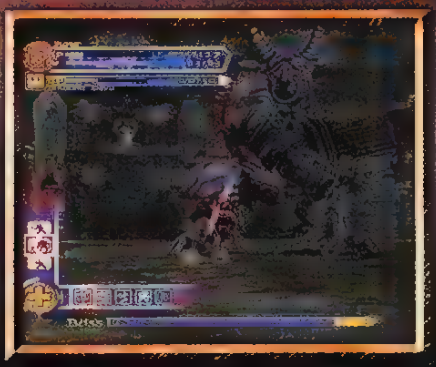

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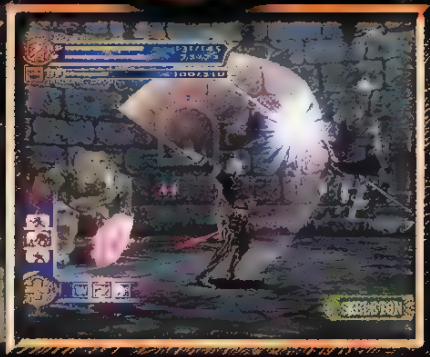

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EDITORIAL

Big things are happening. First off, Nintendo finally showed the world why its upcoming Revolution console is named as such (check out its funky controller on pg. 26). My thoughts? It's exactly what the company needs. Critics are saying the controller may make it difficult for non-Nintendo, third-party developers to translate their games to the console. But c'mon, who's really playing *Tony Hawk* or *Splinter Cell* on the GameCube? We don't need another all-purpose gaming machine with another standard controller. Sony and Microsoft can take care of that just fine. Nintendo can and should do something completely out of the ordinary, so it can draw in new audiences and continue to wow gamers with its quirky new ideas. Sure, you may or may not be able to play the latest *Burnout* on the Revolution, but as long as I can play something *different* on it (see *Metroid Prime*, *Zelda: The Wind Waker*, and *Animal Crossing* on GameCube), I will give it plenty of playtime. Third parties can skip their multiplatform ports to Revolution—I'd rather they make something new and original that actually takes advantage of this newfangled device. Just remember, Nintendo has always done fine in its own niche without a lot of third-party support. It's not going to topple Sony's empire, so why not do something different?

Also, the Xbox 360 is almost upon us. I just got back from playing a bunch of its launch games, and...well, just set your expectations to "realistic" (and I don't mean "realistic graphics") and you won't come away disappointed. The visuals are clearly better than what you can find on current-generation systems, but by how much depends on what you're looking at. *Condemned*, *Project Gotham Racing 3*, and *Call of Duty 2* top my list of lookers and are clearly next gen in look and feel. On the other hand, most sports games I saw would piss me off if I paid $400 for a new console to play them. Forget the games, though. Oddly enough, what I'm most excited about is the machine itself. From smart online matchmaking to streaming tunes from my iPod, the services are really why I'll be buying an Xbox 360 on November 22.

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

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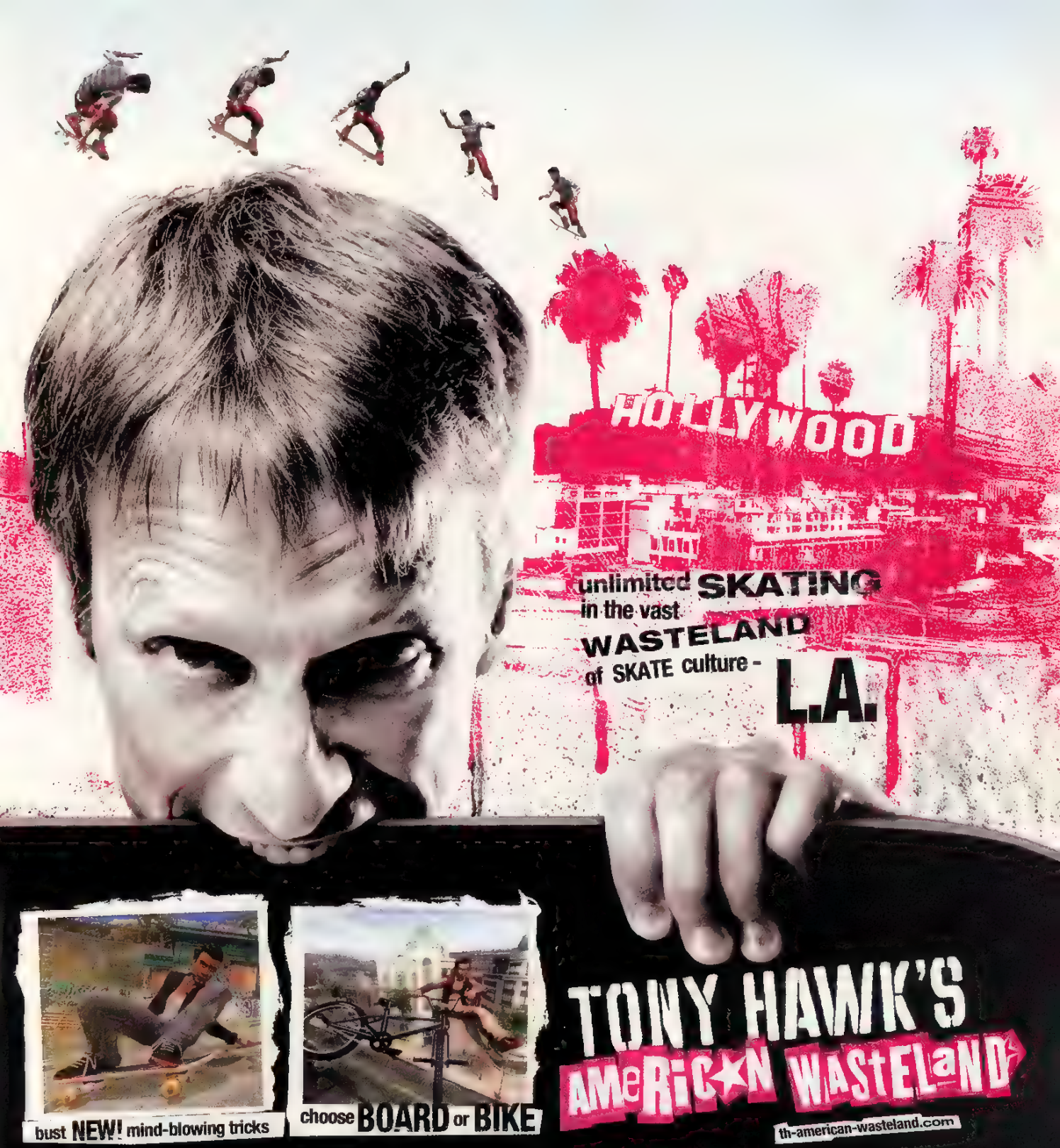

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ranting, raving, and remote-control erotic gaming

Revolution Controller: Yeah!

Nintendo has truly hit the spot this time. The recently unveiled Revolution controller is a breath of fresh air. To my fellow gamers: Please wait until you play it. I'm sure you are all tired of the same old stuff. Let's just give it a shot. The Xbox 360 has Live, and the PS3 has every publisher in the world, but the Revolution is the wild card. It will be either a major success or a major failure. Is a gaming revolution about to happen? The potential is there, but Nintendo has to lead the way, and I know they can do it.

—Miguel

Revolution Controller: Meh!

After finally getting to see what the deal is with the Revolution's controller, I have to say that I'm pretty much in love...with the concept. Here's the problem: Nintendo, which was already suffering from a lack of quality third-party titles, has succeeded at alienating even more developers. People are complaining that the PS3's Cell processor will be difficult to port to, but in order to port to the Revolution, developers will need to rework their entire control systems.

—Gabe Weintraub

Nintendo's secret-weapon controller looks a little familiar.

Revolution Controller: Boo!

Why does it seem like Sony and Microsoft listen and deliver what the people want while Nintendo *tells* people what they want or what the industry "needs"? I don't want my wheel reinvented, Nintendo! Hey, kids: With all the great mock-ups and artists' conceptions we've seen of what the Revolution controller could look like, you had a prototype in your living room all along: a freaking TV remote. Oh boy.

—Joshua Warren

Freeloader Beware

A few months back you guys did an article about TrialClix ("Free and (Not so) Easy," *EGM* #194), the people who advertise free Xboxes and PSPs. I figured my time isn't really worth anything, so I gave it a shot. I did exactly as you guys said: I made a table with the dates, cancellation and confirmation numbers, contact information, the works. I signed up for about 14 offers and was credited for about 10 of them. After a few weeks, I went through the ordeal of canceling and dealing with customer service. I had finally saved enough points to order a few Amazon.com gift certificates. Only here's where the problems started. A month goes by, and what do I see on my credit card? A $45 charge. I called and talked to someone, and they promised a refund. Another month passes and I get another $30 dollar charge. I tried contacting them again and got no response. I had to call and cancel my credit card, $75 later. I figured at least I would be getting a few gift certificates out of it, but no luck. The only way they can be contacted is through e-mail, and all I've been getting is an automated response. You should know that they have an "as seen in *EGM*" on their site, and if I were you guys, I wouldn't want to be associated with them.

—Jesse Aaron

Thanks for the heads up, Jesse. We're printing this as a warning to readers. We're also talking to our lawyers about having the *EGM* mention on the TrialClix site taken down. In the meantime, don't end up like Jesse, kids.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

War is Not a Game

There are so many games these days that depict World War II as if it were a glorious thing. Will there come a time when we play games based on September 11th? I don't really ever see game developers making such a game, but I use it as an analogy for what's happening in these WWII games. We should think about how people who experienced the war must feel when they see these games glorifying it, games that use Pearl Harbor and D-Day as playgrounds. You have to wonder (though they couldn't foresee the advent of videogames) whether they ever imagined that their grandchildren would be entertained by such a terrible war.

—Chris Ciancanelli

Thanks for the thoughtful comments, Chris. For your Letter of the Month, you'll be receiving a game from the *EGM* vaults.

The line between historical and exploitive is a thin one. We hope developers walk it carefully.

The Socratic Method

In the article "No Nookie Allowed" (*EGM* #196), editor Jennifer Tsao writes [about the *Grand Theft Auto* Hot Coffee sex scenes]: "It's consensual sex, after all, and its original gameplay function seems to have been to reward a strong relationship with your girlfriend. Sounds almost... emotionally healthy?"

Well, Mrs. Tsao, since you ended this suggestion with a question, I feel obligated to pose an answer. In doing so, I also feel it necessary to pose your question a bit more realistically, for those readers out there who can express themselves without using the word "sucks." So, here's another version to consider:

"It's tagging that [virtual] ass/unsafe sex/promotion of promiscuous fornication/digital pornography, after all, and its original gameplay function was to reward lonesome introverts for pimping out a virtual whore. Sounds almost... immoral, shameful, debased, and emotionally deprived?"

—XdigitalMajiX

Erotic? Maybe if you're into Barbie dolls and awkward polygons.

"Digital pornography"? Guess that depends on what you look for in a sex object. Our personal preference is for something a little more...alive. "Promotion of promiscuous fornication"? We don't know about you, but after watching CJ's robo-grind (just look at the expression on his face), we've frankly lost all interest in sex. ➤

POST OFFICE

Rambling and ranting from our message boards, **boards.1UP.com** (look for *Electronic Gaming Monthly*'s forums)

The Revolution controller: Glorified TV remote or interface of the future?

JFK90787: I'm approaching it with cautious optimism. If it were anyone other than Nintendo, I'd have dismissed it from the beginning.

Alex_Bond007: The Power Glove of the new generation, and it still sucks.

Atomic_Gerbil: A controller is only as good as the games that take advantage of its features.

The_Diabolical: Pure genius! It's only a matter of time until Sony steals it.

NYCMAJESTIC: You mean we have something more to look forward to next gen than just better graphics? Hallelujah!

Hawkx: Innovative, revolutionary, and the worst thing I have ever seen.

Linkthelegend2: I think we can all agree the Revolution controller looks more comfortable than the PS3's boomerang controller.

Draxle: Speculating about the Revolution feels like having to predict the weather for next month.

MetalGearHalo: Now we can blame Nintendo for the millions of black eyes of millions of children.

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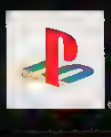

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BONUS GALLERY

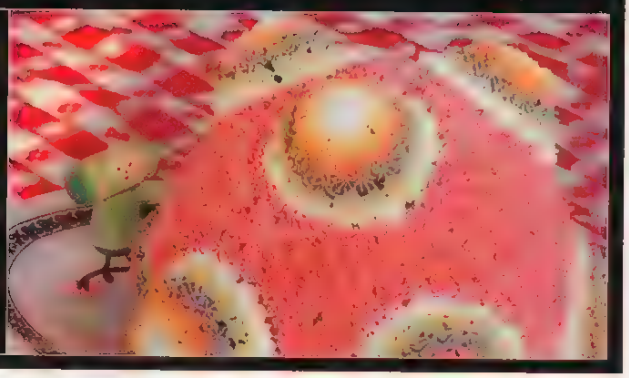
Going the extra mile for love of the game

Delicious Katamari

EGM: Holy crap. How did you make that?

Fae Fairbanks: Well, first I sculpted the inchling Prince from a lightweight clay—all hand-sculpted, no tools. Then I painted and varnished him, of course. Then I had him roll up some brownie, then some frosting...

EGM: We are most impressed. Yes, indeed. Yes. A delicious katamari. May we put our finger in it?



WIN THE GAME OF THE MONTH

We've hidden movie quotes in this issue—spot one and you can win our Game of the Month. Go to EGM-GOTM.1UP.com. There you can send us a message (subject head: **Movie Quote EGM #197**) with the quote, the movie it's from, and the page number you found it on. Include your mailing address (no P.O. boxes!) and your full name. Three randomly selected readers will win copies of this issue's Game of the Month.

Compaq: The Handheld of Choice?

When the Sony PSP and Nintendo DS systems came out this year, my first thought was, it's about damn time. I'm sorry, but if you think either of these systems are innovative or high tech, you have been misled somewhere. I bought a used Compaq Ipaq 3850 Pocket PC for $225 two years ago, and it still does more than the DS or PSP. It has a touch screen, and it plays movies, MP3s, and PlayStation-esque games. I have the original *Tomb Raider* on it. It seems to me that Nintendo and Sony are a few years behind on technology and innovation.

—*Josh Susmarski*

The handheld gaming choice of lawyers on lunch breaks and tech fetishist who value toys over games.

***Tomb Raider*, huh? Wow, sounds totally awesome. Enjoy that.**

Playing With Yourself

Over the last couple of years, your magazine has devoted a disproportionately large amount of attention and hype to online multiplayer. Now, I am not some stuck-in-the-8-bit-days type of gamer. I realize that online is the way of the future (heck, I play online myself), but I find myself wishing for a bit more perspective, especially in your reviews. It seems as if the Review Crew often views online play as requisite for a high score, which I think is ludicrous. To listen to you guys, single-player games are a dying breed, or somehow "incomplete."

So how about easing up on the multiplayer euphoria and realizing that most gamers still care primarily about the single-player experience?

—*Matt Raillard*

Reviews Editor Demian Linn responds: "Depends on the game, Matt. If publisher Activision decided to ax online multiplayer in the *Tony Hawk* series, we probably wouldn't lose too much sleep. But with games like *Splinter Cell* or *Halo 2*, a great online component can mean near-limitless replay value. We also go to great lengths to set up full multiplayer matches, so after spending those hours and hours online, we want to talk about it."

Final Fantasy Explained

I never played *Final Fantasy* before. Can you tell me about it? I heard it is like *Golden Sun*. That is my favorite game ever.

—*Daniel*

Imagine a world made of hard-candy rainbows, strewn hither and yon with unicorns frolicking across powdered-sugar snow drifts. Throw in a bunch of menus and bad haircuts and you get the general idea. Except for the unicorns...and the rainbows.

Optional Teleportation Controller

Having grown up in the 8- through 32-bit eras, videogames no longer seem like the same entity to me. Between 32:9 displays, graphics that make real life look low res, and capabilities that replace our computers, it's a whole new world. I can get the $299 basic set or the $399 version with included adapter to use my brain as a hard drive. Don't forget the controllers that will teleport me to the mall to buy games that require more manpower than the government to develop. My question is this: When will we realize that we've stopped playing videogames and started playing alternate realities?

—*Pyractyc N-Axticide*

Whoa...our minds are blown. How do you know you're not living in a videogame right now, dude?

Concept art for *Final Fantasy XII*? Vaan here would certainly fit in with unicorns.

GAME DESIGN-O-RAMA

Got proof that game design is best left to the pros? Send your concept (with art) to EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject: design-o-rama.

Walk3r

Only a year away from retirement, Tanner won't let a plastic hip slow him down. Utilize all the vehicles at your disposal, including walkers, motorized scooters, and the city bus (use your senior-discounted pass!) to chase down the crooks. A host of pharmaceutical power-ups litter the streets (just make sure you avoid the Vioxx, or you'll risk a heart attack). Crossword puzzles and marathon naps break up the action. Just remember to nab the bad guys before 3 p.m., or else you'll miss reruns of *Matlock* and the early-bird special at IHOP.

—*Dallas Wagn3r*

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LOCK AND LOAD...
DOOM RPG IS HERE.

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KOEI ANNOUNCED THAT IT WILL MAKE GAMES FOR NINTENDO'S NEXT-GENERATION SYSTEM. AND IF YOU ASK US, THE PUBLISHER'S

NEXT-GEN UPDATE REVOLUTION

REMOTE CONTROLLER

Forget everything you know about videogame controllers and brace yourself for **Nintendo's Revolution**-ary new design

Nintendo is after your mom. And your sister. And maybe your grandpa, too.

That's the message behind the radically unique controller for the company's upcoming Revolution console, a one-handed, wireless, motion-sensitive device designed to lure ex- and nongamers into the world of electronic entertainment, while at the same time give veterans a new way to play. Nintendo finally revealed the controller in September at the Tokyo Game Show, ending months of speculation and rumors ranging from trackballs to virtual reality helmets. *EGM* was one of a handful of worldwide press members invited to a special viewing of the controller before the show to try it out for ourselves.

It works like this: Two small sensors (each about the size of a dime) placed somewhere near your TV track both the controller's position and its orientation, so by moving the unit anywhere (side to side, up and down, into or away from the screen) or tilting it in any direction, you can affect the action onscreen. You could slash a sword by waving the controller side to side, target enemies in a shooter by pointing it like a light gun, or throw a punch by holding it and, well, actually throwing a punch.

"We need a new [way] to get new players [into playing videogames]," Nintendo President Satoru Iwata said at the unveiling. "If we cannot expand the market [for games], all we can do is wait for the industry to slowly die." The controller, he explained, is Nintendo's attempt at lowering the bar for less-experienced gamers, giving them a fun and intuitive way to play. "In order to have a controller that anyone can understand, we had to come up with a design that doesn't look like anyone else's," he says. "We needed to abandon the memories of past successes and get back to the basics." Hence, the simple remote-control-like design. "There are people in every family who would never touch a [game controller]," says Iwata, "but anyone would pick up a TV remote."

> **"There are people who would never touch a [game controller], but anyone would pick up a TV remote."** —*Nintendo President Satoru Iwata*

As for those of you who might like your controllers just the way they are, thank you very much, Nintendo also stressed this Revolution "remote" (our name for it—it has no official title yet) could slip into shells of more conventional controllers, bongo drums, dancepads, you name it. Also, when it's released sometime in 2006 (fall is a safe bet), every Revolution will come with the Nunchaku attachment, a second controller piece for your other hand which plugs into the bottom of the remote and adds an analog stick and two trigger buttons. In this configuration, the controller can act more like today's dual analog gamepads, with the right stick replaced by actually angling the remote itself; instead of pushing a stick left to look left, for example, you'd simply point the remote in that direction. "It will provide a brand-new feeling for controlling first-person shooters and action games," says Iwata. "I want you to look forward to seeing how your most beloved games will feel with the new controller."

Not everyone is so excited. Some, like Midway's Ed Boon (*Mortal Kombat*), expect Nintendo to quickly release a pad similar to the PS2's DualShock 2 and for that to become the prevalent Revolution controller. "I think Nintendo would be crazy to bet the farm on such a dramatic departure from what people are accustomed to," he says. Others wonder if developing for such a different controller will scare away outside third-party developer support, already a tricky area historically for Nintendo systems.

But on the whole, the reaction in the press and industry has been surprisingly optimistic. *Metal Gear Solid* creator Hideo Kojima lit up when we asked for his opinion. "It's really cool because Nintendo broke their own rule," he says. "They defined the controller with the [old 8-bit Nintendo pad] and now they are changing it. It's so revolutionary. [I] see infinite possibilities because this controller can be used by [anybody]." *Sonic*'s pappy, Yuji Naka; *Fable* creator Peter Molyneux; and Ubisoft's Michel Ancel (of *Rayman* and now *King Kong* fame) are all on the record as big fans. Even outspoken Microsoft supporter Tomonobu Itagaki (*Dead or Alive*, *Ninja Gaiden*) had something nice to say.

But then, developers have nothing to gain by slagging the Revolution at this point; the true test will be if they create games around the unique controller or merely tack on compatibility as an afterthought—or if they make games for the system at all. "Whether or not it will become a smash hit," as Kojima says, "is now up to the game creators." —*Mark MacDonald* ➤

The Yamadas' once-charming interest in *Mario Party* had become clearly unhealthy.

All Video, No Game

Nintendo revealed the controller to the public for the first time in a short video presentation that demonstrated a variety of its possible uses: as a knife, conductor's baton, fly swatter, fishing pole, tennis racket, and more. Interestingly enough, the video didn't show any games at all, only actors (of all ages) pantomiming with the controller—you could tell just by their motions and the sound effects what was going on. Nintendo is definitely emphasizing gameplay over graphics with the Revolution, but when will we see real games? Our guess is not until the industry's E3 trade show in May.

Our Hand-on Impressions:

Based on our short time with the controller and a handful of simple minigames Nintendo had to demonstrate the motion-sensing technology, we found the remote comfortable, sensitive, and impressively accurate. Don't worry about a learning curve—we were up and having fun in seconds flat. It isn't necessary to hold your arm out or wave it around wildly (though that seems to be most players' first instinct)—slight wrist movements, with the remote resting on your lap, will suffice. Whether that opinion will hold up after a longer session with a real game, of course, remains to be seen.

With the included Nunchaku attachment, the Revolution controller can work more like current dual-analog gamepads.

HACK-N-SLASH *DYNASTY WARRIORS* SERIES SEEMS LIKE A PERFECT FIT FOR THE CONTROLLER... ➤➤

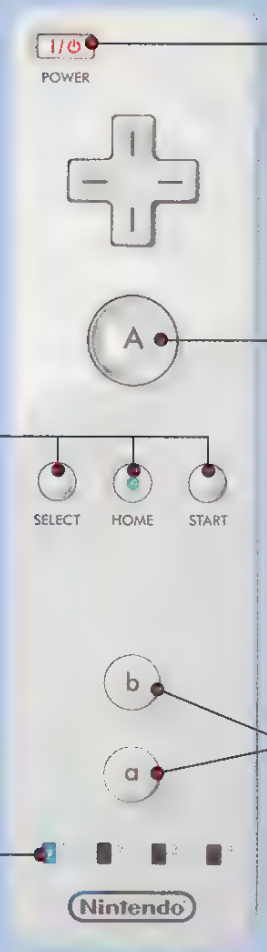
NEXT-GEN UPDATE REVOLUTION (CONT.)

THE REVOLUTION CONTROLLER: PIECE BY PIECE

We assume this emitter on top is for **light-gun--style applications.**

The B trigger on the bottom of the controller falls under your index finger, **perfect for shooting games.**

A rumble feature and tilt sensitivity are both built right into the controller.



It's safe to say this will **turn on your Revolution console** and the controller. If it's idle for long enough, the controller may power down to conserve energy.

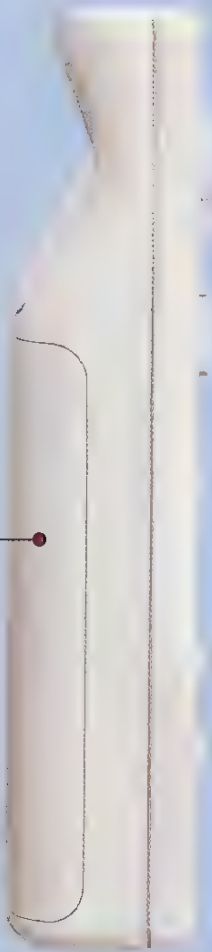
As with the GameCube controller, **a single ginormous A button** takes center stage right under your thumb.

Select and Start are pretty self-explanatory, but **what about this Home button?** Nintendo wasn't ready to discuss it just yet, but we know enough to say it'll have to do with system menus (probably much like the Guide button in the center of the Xbox 360's pad). Knowing the Revolution will be Wi-Fi capable and have the ability to download older games through its Virtual Console, you can see how this would come in handy.

The **battery compartment.** The controller prototype we tried out used standard batteries (which, according to Nintendo, will last about as long as they would in the GameCube's Wavebird wireless controller), but the final model may be rechargeable.

These buttons may seem hard to reach when you're holding the controller with one hand, but **imagine turning it 90 degrees on its side and holding it with both hands**—it becomes just like an old NES pad. Perfect for playing old Nintendo games you've downloaded via the Virtual Console.

The Revolution can handle **up to four controllers;** these lights remind you which player you are.



"The gateway to enormous possibilities for expansion," according to Iwata. **This is where the Nunchaku attachment and other peripherals connect to the remote,** or where the remote can plug into other controller shells, like this GameCube Wavebird mock-up we made to demonstrate how it might be used for older games. ➤

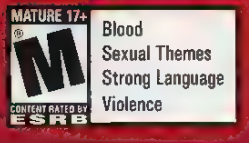
Other Tidbits:

- We don't know yet how or **if the controller will work with the Revolution's optional DVD player** (but we assume it will).
- Nintendo expects the controller to **work up to 15 feet from your TV.**
- This isn't the final model of the controller—button names, sizes, and positions may change slightly. Also, Nintendo said other features will be shown later. We're guessing **a built-in mic** for voice-controlled and online games, at least, and possibly also **a digital camera à la Sony's EyeToy.**

>> NEXT FEBRUARY, THE SURVIVAL-HORROR PS2 FRANCHISE *SIREN* WILL HEAD TO THE SILVER SCREEN...IN JAPAN, THAT IS... >>

FABLE

THE LOST CHAPTERS



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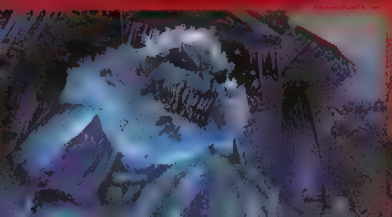
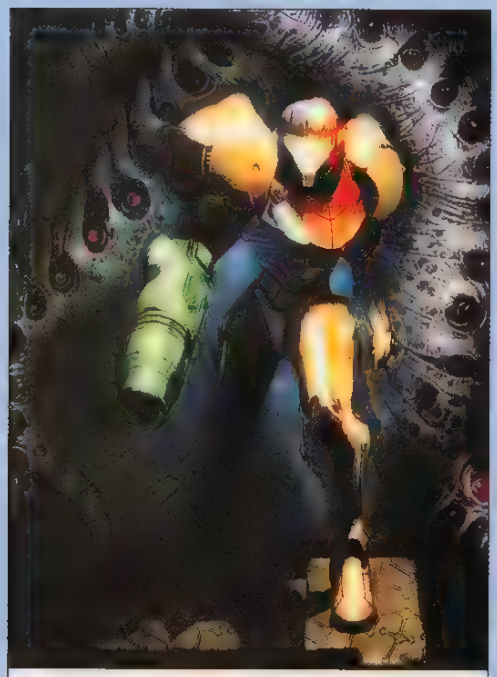


NEXT-GEN UPDATE REVOLUTION (CONT.)

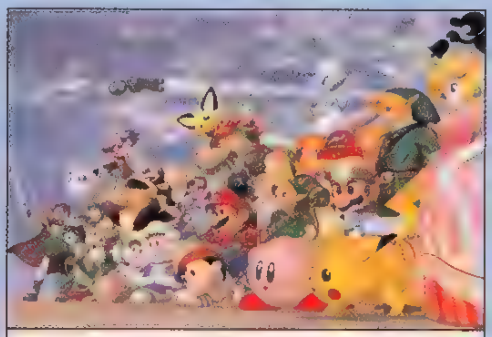
HOW WILL IT BE USED?

In the Official Games

We know these games are coming, but how they'll use the controller is anyone's guess. So here's ours:



Metroid Prime 3 • One of the demos Nintendo let us play was a version of *Prime 2* retrofitted to use the new Revolution controller in its Nunchaku setup. It worked great—**the analog stick controls your movement and you point the remote anywhere to look around.** You didn't even need to lock on to enemies—just aim at them and fire. *Prime 3* is sure to use this setup. (Just take it easy on the keys this time, OK guys?)



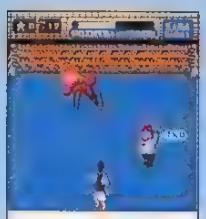
Super Smash Bros. • Assuming the gameplay stays 2D (hey, who knows?), a simple way to use the controller would be to have you **wave it in any direction to attack that way, or up to jump.** But, as with the Revolution *Mario* title, we bet the game changes dramatically to fit the controller.

Super Mario Bros. • Nintendo is trying to have this game ready in time for the Revolution launch, and we imagine it will be designed entirely around the remote the same way *Mario 64* was built around the then-new analog stick. Flicking the controller up to jump seems like a no-brainer, but we'd guess this game will use it in just about every way imaginable—**pointing it to aim fireballs, tilting it to steer Mario flying in the air or riding on Yoshi,** etc.

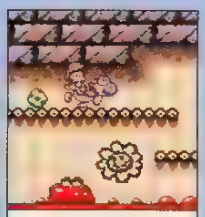
The Legend of Zelda • Nintendo President Iwata mentioned he was anxious to see how *Zelda* would use the Nunchaku configuration—we think the remote would be perfect for **sword control, aiming the hook shot, and, of course, the obligatory *Zelda* fishing minigame.**

In Older and Unannounced Games

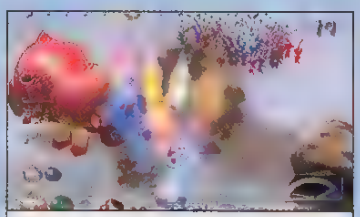
Other Nintendo games and existing titles we'd love to see take advantage of the Revolution's controller:



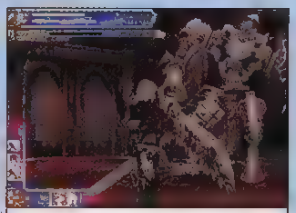
Punch-Out!! (NES) One controller in each hand, flip them up or down for high or low punches.



Yoshi's Island (SNES) • Aim and fire eggs just by pointing with the remote and pulling the B trigger.



Pikmin (GC) • Use the remote like a laser pointer to corral the little buggers, then fling them around by flicking it. *Pikmin*'s creator Shigeru Miyamoto told us himself the controller is "well suited" for this series.



Castlevania • How cool would it be to use the controller like a whip? Series mastermind Koji Igarashi seemed intrigued, though he wondered if it would get too tiring.

Star Wars • One word: lightsaber. The Revolution has its killer app. Can we get a "hell yes!"?

>> MORE REV CONTROLLER IDEAS: TILT IT TO CONTROL A *KATAMARI DAMACY* BALL OR USE IT LIKE A BRUSH IN CAPCOM'S UPCOMING *OKAMI*.... >>

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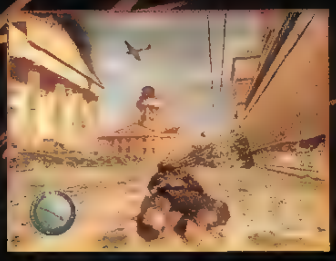

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-Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine Preview, June 2005

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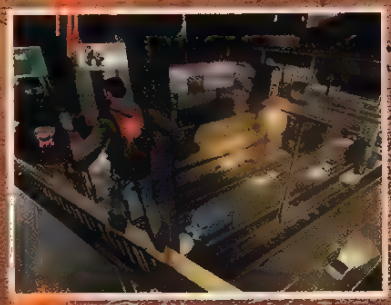
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AFTERTHOUGHTS: SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

Giant-sized insights on Sony's art-house hit

After impressing critics, game designers, and a dedicated (albeit small) group of fans with his 2001 cult classic *Ico*, Sony Computer Entertainment's Fumito Ueda spent four years directing his latest PS2 project, *Shadow of the Colossus*. Once again, he's forged an uncompromising work of artistic vision. While the game initially seems somewhat traditional—its tale of a brave warrior embarking on a valiant quest on horseback clearly echoes Nintendo's legendary *Zelda: The Ocarina of Time* (N64)—after facing off against *Shadow*'s 16 titanic colossus bosses, you'll swear that you've never played anything even remotely like it. We sat down with Ueda to shed some light on his shadowy, mysterious creation....

—Shane Bettenhausen

EGM: What inspired you to create *Shadow of the Colossus*?

Fumito Ueda: It's very hard to pinpoint the birth of my concept for *Shadow of the Colossus*. It's a combination of books I've read, games I've played, and all things I have seen during my lifetime. I've always been a fan of monster movies, too...perhaps that's at the root of it. And also, in most games you'll see these massive boss characters that you never get to really interact with. I really wanted to explore the relationship between hero and boss.

■ A grainy shot from the "*Nico*" trailer.

EGM: Before you even began working on *Shadow*, you showed a teaser trailer for the project, which was called "*Nico*" at the time. In that video, multiple characters on horseback battled a giant creature. Was multiplayer gameplay ever considered?

FU: What you saw in that video was something that we were considering at that time in the development cycle, but we later decided to focus on having just one hero who must overcome these colossi in order to triumph. I still have that multiplayer concept in my mind, of course....

EGM: Which colossus is your personal favorite?

FU: I'm afraid that if I tell you, you'll put it in the magazine.... Let's just say that I like aquatic and airborne battles.

EGM: Are there colossi that you created that were cut from the game?

FU: When we were in the early planning stages, there were definitely more colossi. But we starting paring down the list through a series of strict selections, choosing the ones that are most enjoyable for players to fight.

EGM: *Shadow* is a very linear game, yet the boss battles invite players to experiment and improvise ways to fight them. Was that a conscious decision?

FU: When creating the game's concept, we balanced purposeful, directed content with a sense of spontaneity. We had to set rules for the environment, timing, and other concrete aspects, but we want players to discover their own manner of bringing the colossi down.

EGM: Tell us about the original language you developed for the game's dialogue.

FU: When designing the language for *Shadow*, we had a semitransparent outline for what we wanted to achieve. One concept was the Romanization of Japanese, and then editing and transforming it into what it is now. Later on, when we were incorporating the voiceover work, we told the actors to make it sound as realistic as they possibly could.

EGM: The ending is very mysterious...did you want to leave the audience guessing?

FU: The essential goal of the ending was to leave it slightly vague, but also to imply a never-ending story that will be left up to the individual gamer's imagination. Yes, that was quite deliberate [in order] to keep the gamer guessing.

EGM: During the ending, the player can control the action at certain points...can the outcome change?

FU: You can move around the hole and attack people, but no other options can actually transpire. The ending doesn't change, but we do leave it open in some ways...you know that something else could have happened.

EGM: What central theme did you intend to impart through the game's story?

FU: What did you take away from it?

EGM: Hmm...the overall theme seemed to be about sacrifice, we'd say.

FU: You could call it "sacrifice," but I think it's a bit closer to "self-sacrifice," that of the colossi, the main character, and even your horse, Agro. They all have to go through a great deal in order to achieve the final goal and bring life back to the girl. It's not an easy feeling to put into words. We didn't want to pinpoint it to one specific thing—we wanted to leave it vague to allow each gamer to take away his or her own deeper meaning.

EGM: Did you ever feel that you had to compromise your artistic vision in order to make a game with more mainstream appeal?

>> MORE PSP HAPPENINGS—THIS DECEMBER, UBISOFT WILL BRING TO SONY'S HANDHELD *PRINCE OF PERSIA*, WHICH IS BASICALLY A PORT

SECRETS OF THE COLOSSUS

Finishing off the final colossus is just the beginning of the fun. Intrepid players can unlock scads of unexpected bonuses by tackling the game's hard mode and time attack challenges.

Crestfallen That the Game Offers No Items to Collect?

News flash: For every two colossi that you kill within the target time in time attack mode, you'll score a special piece of equipment. You can get 14 items in total, seven each in normal and hard modes. These objects aren't mere trophies, either—each piece of gear legitimately affects gameplay. We won't give them all away, but examples include the Cloak of Force, which makes your attacks hurt the colossi more, and the Whistling Arrow, a special arrow that draws the bosses' attention in the direction that you shoot it.

Climb the Highest Tower

During the game's ending, you'll see an idyllic garden location atop the massive temple that serves as the game's central hub. Did you know that you can actually get up there? In order to scale the massive façade, you'll have to amass a great deal of strength and stamina. After you've beaten the fourth colossus in hard mode, you'll just barely have enough gusto to make the treacherous climb. Look for vines on one side of the building—jump from horseback to get a li'l boost.

A Horse of a Different Color

If you beat the game on hard mode, you'll unlock two other colors for your trusty steed, Agro. Hold down the Triangle or Circle button while beginning a new game and you'll straddle a snowy white or chestnut brown version of your horse. Also, try experimenting with the controls while on horseback (even on your normal-colored mount): You'll find several undocumented moves, including riding sidesaddle, standing up on the saddle, a quick turnaround, and full-speed instant takeoff.

FU: Basically, the only limitations we had were hardware limitations. In terms of creative design, we were left to our own energies, and Sony never said, "You can't do that" or "You have to do this." I was totally on my own to produce and create in the way that I wanted to. In that respect, I'm very happy with the outcome.

EGM: Are you looking forward to working on PlayStation 3 games? You'll have far fewer hardware limitations then, right?

FU: We're all looking forward to the world of PS3. It will bring with it better graphics, better character manipulation, and a new direction for the whole industry. As a director, though, I'm worried. How will we be able to distinguish one game from another when all games will start to look alike? Everything will look like reality.

OF LAST YEAR'S *WARRIOR WITHIN*. AND IN FEBRUARY, IT'LL RELEASE A PSP VERSION OF *187: RIDE OR DIE* (OH, DEAR GOD, WHY?).... >>

THIS MONTH: SCOTT CAMPBELL
ART DIRECTOR FOR DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS

TAKE THIS JOB: ART DIRECTOR

Our monthly look at the jobs you want—with tips from the guys who have them

CAMPBELL'S DETAILS

Experience: Nine years in the industry
Notable games: Lots of Lucas Learning titles—*Yoda's Challenge* (Mac/PC), *Star Wars Math: Jabba's Game Galaxy* (Mac/PC)—and *Psychonauts* (PS2/XB)

Art director job data

Salary range: $90,000 to $150,000
Recommended education and skills: Art school, a solid art-history education, as well as game-oriented skills such as 3D modeling and texturing.
Location of most jobs: West Coast
Current level of demand: Medium

What's an art director?

He or she is "someone who can establish a clear vision of what the game will look like and communicate that vision to the rest of the art team," Campbell says. A good portion of his job involves gathering as many visual references as possible and checking on the rest of his staff's work to make sure things stay consistent all around. He also draws...a lot.

Campbell's typical day

The first thing he does in the morning is draw a comic to get himself and the rest of the Double Fine staff inspired (find an archive of his work at doublefine.com). Next, he'll draw a bunch of concept illustrations and storyboards (as early as possible, before the distractions begin). Then the meetings begin, first with Double Fine Prez Tim Schafer to show him artwork, then with the concept team to show them illustrations.

Campbell says he spends 75 percent of the day drawing—though much of it is rough sketching. "It can be really sloppy as long as it gets the information across," he says.

How he got the job

Campbell got his first gig at Lucas Learning after college, helped along by a friend working at LucasArts. While the job wasn't what he ultimately wanted to be doing, he says that starting with a small company was good, since it allowed him to try his hand at all kinds of art-related stuff. It also gave Campbell the chance to meet Schafer, who at the time was working next door at LucasArts. Schafer was in the process of starting Double Fine; after seeing some of Campbell's work at an art show, Schafer was sold—and Campbell became his AD.

—*Evan Shamoon*

TOOLS OF HIS TRADE

Art books

Campbell collects children's books, comics, and art books on everything from '50s design to Ed Emberley's *How to Draw* series to books on the art of *The Incredibles*. "I have a really hard time not buying them when I see them," he says. "This is the stuff that gets me inspired."

Art programs

Adobe Photoshop and *Corel Painter* are Campbell's primary tools. He'll draw things on paper, then scan them into *Photoshop* to do coloring and touch-up work when necessary.

Google and Corbis.com

Google and Corbis image searches are where Scott normally turns when looking for photo reference for a specific project. Refrigerators from the '50s, Cub Scout uniforms, milk cartons...whatever the project requires, he's got to find examples of it.

Arts and crafts

Campbell's desk overflows with pens, colored pencils, crayons, and lots of paper. "Having different drawing tools available allows you to draw in whatever style your mood dictates," he says.

Photo courtesy Michael Seaton

NEXT MONTH'S JOB: LEVEL DESIGNER

>> DIG OUT THOSE PARACHUTE PANTS. UBISOFT WILL BRING *FLOW: URBAN DANCE UPRISING* TO PS2 BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR.... >>

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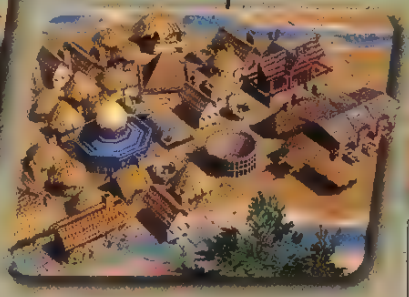
200 BC

216 AD



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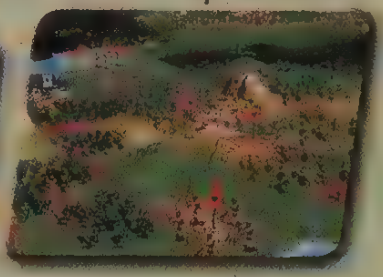

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NEXT-GEN UPDATE PLAYSTATION 3

GEARING UP FOR BATTLE

Solid Snake leads **PlayStation 3** into the next-gen war

Although Sony failed to deliver on its promise of having playable PlayStation 3 games at September's Tokyo Game Show, the industry leader didn't simply allow rivals Microsoft and Nintendo to hog the spotlight. A lengthy, visually stunning gameplay trailer of Konami's PS3-exclusive *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* quickly established the stealth-action sequel as the must-see game of the show, not to mention the only real PS3 title with much of a presence on the show floor. A handful of other trailers (most of which had been previously shown elsewhere) hinted at the multitude of titles supposedly in development. Overall, it seemed as if Sony had purposefully allowed grizzly old Solid Snake to act as its emissary in the brewing next-gen war.

Also, the lack of playable PS3 software caused pundits to worry if the console's expected 2006 release date would slip, but Sony execs assuaged fears by claiming that the system's spring '06 Japanese debut is still on track. Information on a U.S. release date remains speculative at best, but here at *EGM* we're still betting on a launch in time for the '06 holiday shopping season. Sony's next opportunity for the PS3 to meet the press may come in January 2006 at the annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Perhaps there we'll garner concrete info on pricing, release dates, final hardware specifications, launch titles, and whether or not they changed that distressingly ugly Batarang controller design.

Until then, enjoy a glimpse of the future—turn the page for a detailed look at *MGS4*, followed by quick hits on another 10 gorgeous PS3 games. If these titles play as sweetly as they look, Microsoft will have quite a battle on its hands. ➤

PS3 GETS EXPLOSIVE—ATARI ANNOUNCED THAT IT WILL BRING THE *STUNTMAN* (PS2) SEQUEL TO SONY'S NEXT-GEN SYSTEM....

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A PLAYGROUND?
A PARK?

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NEXT-GEN UPDATE PLAYSTATION 3 (CONT.)

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

Konami • 2006

When *Metal Gear Solid* mastermind Hideo Kojima delivers a trailer for one of his genre redefining stealth-action games, gamers take notice. (His legendary *MGS2* clip from 2000's E3 game conference sold a lot of people on the PS2's potential...and the promise of a game starring Solid Snake. Oops.) At least Kojima's known for giving gamers the real deal in terms of visuals: With a lot of other PS3 trailers, we're not sure if we're getting an accurate example of the console's power or merely a gussied-up CG movie masquerading as gameplay. But here, we know it's 100 percent legitimate graphics. (Konami even offered a live demonstration of the demo being manipulated in real time with PS3 hardware.)

But instead of spouting technical mumbo jumbo about high-dynamic-range lighting effects of trilinear mip-mapped particle effects, we're going to get you up to speed on the important stuff about the game itself. We all know that *MGS4* looks pretty already, and you can view the full trailer at tgs.1up.com. Also, be sure to check out next month's issue of *EGM* for an exclusive interview with Mr. Kojima about *MGS4*. Now on with the pontification.

Old Man Snake

MGS4 takes place several years after the events of the Big Shell (aka *MGS2*), but Snake's suddenly looking like a grumpy old man. What gives? Kojima reminds us that Snake is a clone and that all that genetic engineering causes him to age faster than everyone else. Also, note Snake's cynical smirk—Kojima promises that on the PS3 we'll see a massive range of emotions on characters' faces.

Snake's Little Friend

Since Snake's nerdy buddy Otacon isn't about to endanger himself by fighting on the front lines, he's sent a cute miniature Metal Gear to offer remote assistance. We see it deliver a fresh clip to Snake in the trailer, and we have to imagine that it will have other functions (distraction, reconnaissance, etc.).

>> NEXT-GEN DINOSAUR HUNTING—BUENA VISTA GAMES RECENTLY ANNOUNCED THAT IT HAS MANY PROJECTS IN THE WORKS FOR THE NEXT

Nowhere to Hide

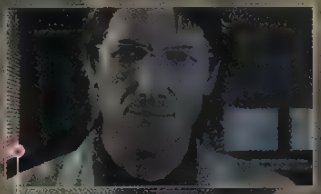
The trailer takes place in a bombed-out urban landscape choked with smoke and airborne debris. Enemy units patrol the streets hunting for cannon fodder. Kojima had previously told us that *MGS4*'s theme would be "nowhere to hide," and he meant it. *MGS4* will be more about reacting to the constantly shifting battlefield around Snake than infiltrating an enemy stronghold.

Sick and Tired

Remember how much fun you didn't have while applying sutures, cleaning wounds, and digging out bullets in *MGS3*? Sadly, Snake's only gotten sicker. In the *MGS4* trailer we see him injecting a mysterious ampoule into his neck after a nasty coughing fit. Kojima promises that Snake won't die at the end of the game, though. Also take note of Snake's new eye patch, the "Solid Eye" system that allows him to check out a radarlike map and scan objects and enemies à la *Metroid Prime* (GameCube).

Metal Gear Sexy

We're not sure whether or not Solid Snake will face another thermonuclear Metal Gear tank in *MGS4*, but we do know that he'll be up against a veritable army of sleek new 20-foot-tall Gears. These bipedal beasts seem extremely dangerous, as their curvaceous (and oddly feminine) legs afford them a massive jump radius.



Old Friends

We know that several familiar faces from past *Metal Gear* games will reappear in this new chapter. Look for Meryl, Revolver Ocelot, Raiden, Vamp, and others to help (or hinder) Snake's mission. So far, the only in-game guest star we have is Otacon, Snake's bookish pal from *MGS1*. He's looking a little older, and, oddly enough, more and more like Hideo Kojima...

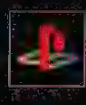
Packin' Heat

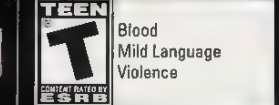
Snake's always had some nifty weaponry, but *MGS4* will up the ante significantly, with over 100 armament combinations. You'll likely need some seriously heavy stuff to take out garrisons of trained enemy soldiers, huge tanks, and those pesky Metal Gears.

ROUND OF CONSOLES, INCLUDING A NEW *TUROK* GAME. WE HOPE THIS MEANS THE RETURN OF *TUROK: EVOLUTION*'S TOBIAS BRUCKNER.... >>

"ONE OF THE BEST-LOOKING SHOOTERS

PlayStation®2





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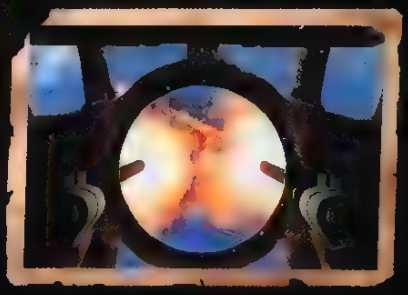
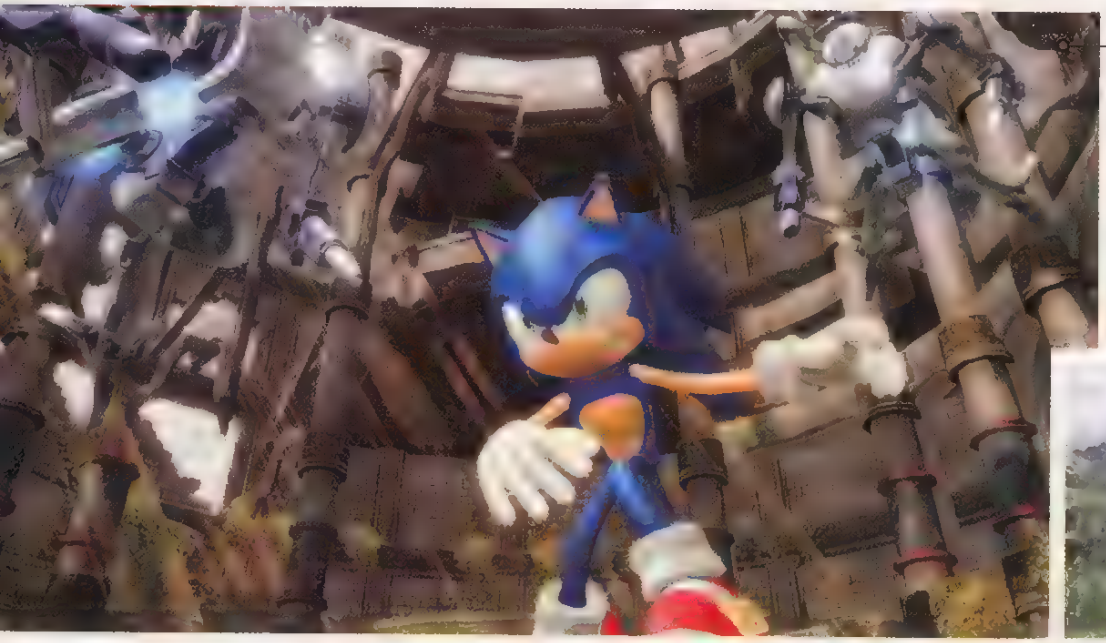


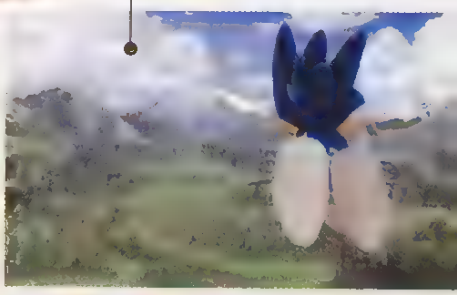
NEXT-GEN UPDATE PLAYSTATION 3 (CONT.)



Sonic the Hedgehog

Sega • 2006

This back-to-basics platformer (also headed to Xbox 360) will mark the spunky blue hedgehog's 15th anniversary in 2006. The clean visuals, insane sense of speed, and simplified run-and-jump gameplay (compared to the convoluted *Sonic Adventure* games) should win back wayward fans turned off by gun-toting *Shadow the Hedgehog*.



Warhawk

SCEA • 2006

This futuristic flight sequel has certainly been a long time coming (the original game graced the PS1 in 1996), but this gussied-up next-gen offering appears to deliver similar airborne shooting action, only against massive armies of aircraft.

Kobal Inertia

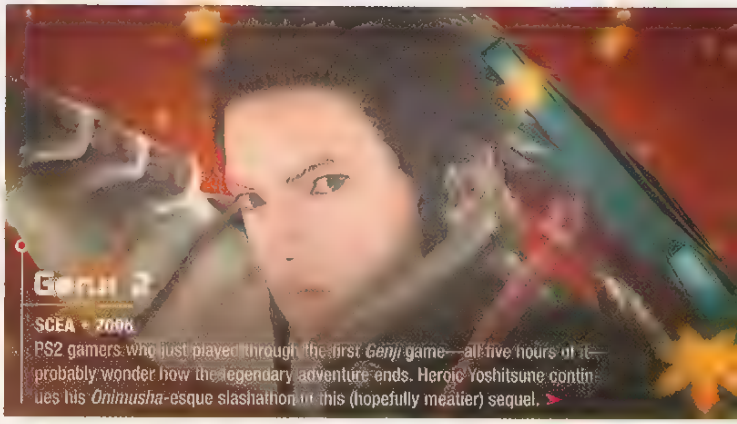
Koei • 2006

Koei's first foray into racing takes players on a breakneck cruise through barren desert wastelands, conjuring up memories of that absurdly long pod-racing sequence in *The Phantom Menace*. We're awaiting confirmation on a possible Jar Jar cameo.

Gran Turismo 5

SCEA • 2006

Pit crews have never looked so dapper. Sony continues to plump a gorgeous-looking *GT* update that will hopefully deliver on all those broken promises from *Gran Turismo 4*, like online gameplay and crowds of realistic spectators.



Genji 2

SCEA • 2006

PS2 gamers who just played through the first *Genji* game—all five hours of it—probably wonder how the legendary adventure ends. Heroic Yoshitsune continues his *Onimusha*-esque slashathon in this (hopefully meatier) sequel.

>> PS3 GETS SCARY—ATARI ANNOUNCED THAT IT'S DEVELOPING A NEW *ALONE IN THE DARK* GAME FOR SONY'S UPCOMING CONSOLE.... >>

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NBA 2K6
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NBA Live '06
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XBox, PS2, NGC

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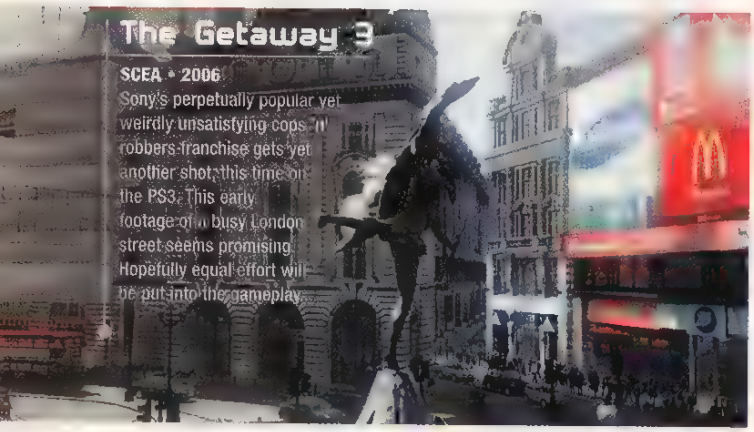
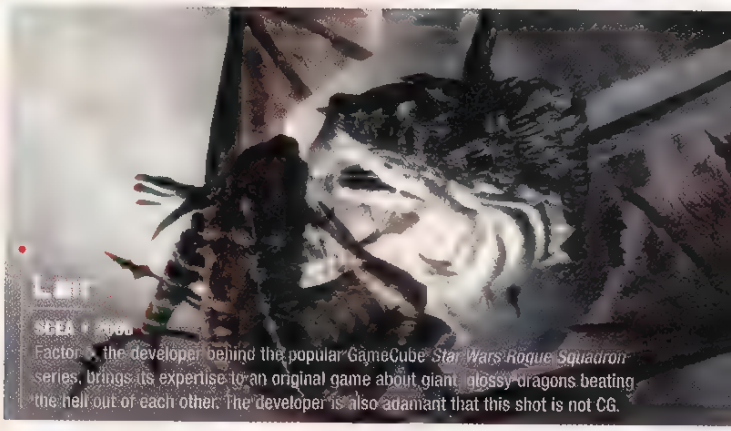


The Getaway 3

SCEA • 2006

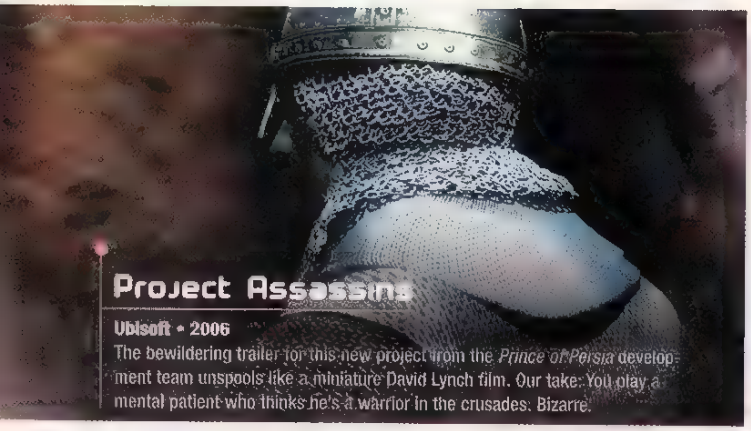
Sony's perpetually popular yet weirdly unsatisfying cops 'n' robbers franchise gets yet another shot, this time on the PS3. This early footage of a busy London street seems promising. Hopefully equal effort will be put into the gameplay.



Lair

SCEA • 2006

Factor 5, the developer behind the popular GameCube *Star Wars Rogue Squadron* series, brings its expertise to an original game about giant, glossy dragons beating the hell out of each other. The developer is also adamant that this shot is not CG.



Project Assassins

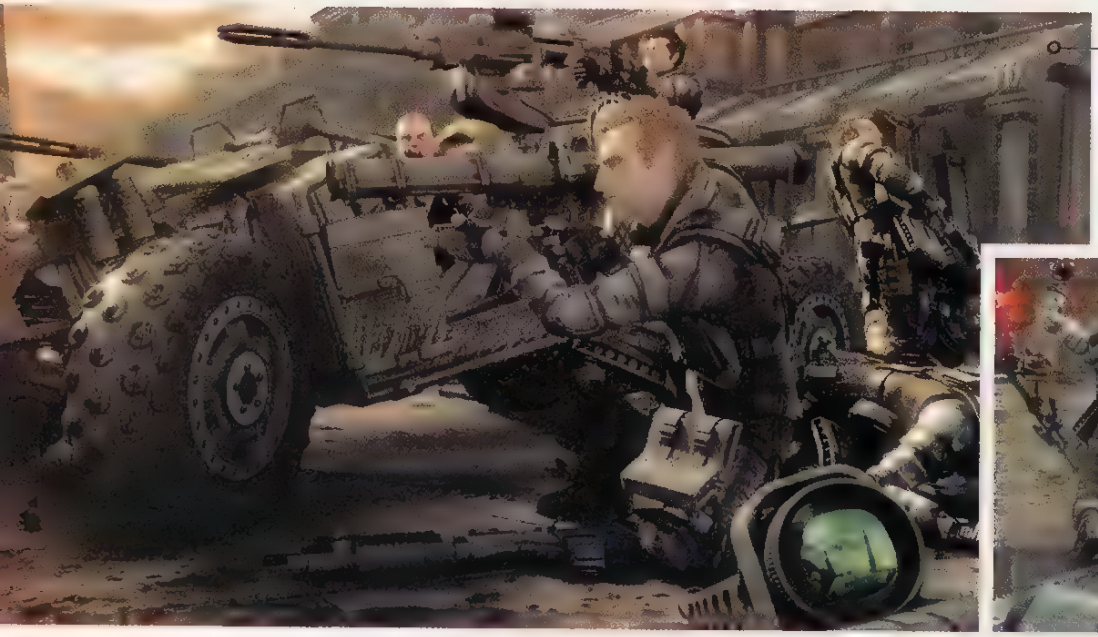
Ubisoft • 2006

The bewildering trailer for this new project from the *Prince of Persia* development team unspools like a miniature David Lynch film. Our take: You play a mental patient who thinks he's a warrior in the crusades. Bizarre.

Motor Storm

SCEA • 2006

Another too-good-to-be-true clip of this off-road racer inspires many viewers to cry foul. Can the PS3 actually pump out visuals of this quality?



Killzone 2

SCEA • 2006

2004's PS2 *Killzone* didn't end up being the "*Halo*-killer" that the media had promised, but it did show serious potential. If the final playable version of this sequel delivers graphics of this caliber, we'll be mighty impressed.

>> TASTE OF THE OLD SCHOOL—KONAMI ANNOUNCED THAT ITS SHOOTING FRANCHISE *GRADIUS* IS COMING TO THE PLAYSTATION 3.... >>

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ONLINE THIS MONTH

Game chatter in the blogosphere

Looking for a comprehensive set of every gaming-related blog you need to read on a regular basis? Ha—that's a good one. These web journals are popping up so rapidly nowadays, it's pretty much impossible to keep track of all of them. A couple rise right to the top—the excellent news aggregators Kotaku (www.kotaku.com) and Joystiq (www.joystiq.com). But beyond that, you start getting the fan blogs, the console-specific blogs, the culture blogs, the humor blogs, the genre blogs...and before you know it, the list is so huge it becomes indecipherable from the Web itself. For this edition of *EGM* Online, we take a look at a few of our favorite developer blogs. —*Jennifer Tsao*

Who/what/why: David Jaffe, director of this year's surprise hit *God of War* (PS2), shares his thoughts on games he's playing, developing a new title for PSP, corporate restructuring at Sony, the recent birth of his second daughter, cognitive therapy, *Star Wars*, weight loss...the list goes on.
Totally out of context quote: "I HATE game design."

URL: davidjaffe.modblog.com

Who/what/why: The *SOCOM* team from Zipper Interactive answers questions from fans, with entries from level designers, artists, and programmers talking about their experiences creating games for the squad-based military shooter series.
Totally out of context quote: "I hope you [gamers] appreciate all the trouble we go through for you."

URL: socomblog.typepad.com

Who/what/why: Want to work on the *Gears of War* (XB360) team? Lead Designer Cliff Bleszinski recruits directly from his blog. He also fills you in on the development of next-gen games, tips for getting into game design, and...horseback riding.
Totally out of context quote: "I sit in front of my computer and download jpegs of Lara Croft all day long."

URLs: www.cliffyb.com, cliffyb.1UP.com

Who/what/why: So what if the main blog's mostly in Japanese? Tetsuya Mizuguchi, who made the quirky titles *Lumines*, *Meteos*, and *Rez*, clearly has his finger on the pulse of...something: You'll find IM logs, pictures, and impressions from his global travels. Plus, he keeps an all-English journal on 1UP.com.
Totally out of context quote: "The power of imagination is proportional to quantity and quality of movement." Uh...OK.

URLs: mizuguchi.biz, mizuguchi.1UP.com

Who/what/why: This is a blog disguised as a company news section, but it's updated regularly—and hilariously—by *Psychonauts* (PS2/XB) mastermind Tim Schafer. Read this, because it may be the only Schafer humor you see for the next few years.
Totally out of context quote: "Everybody look over there while I kill these monkeys!"

URL: www.doublefine.com/news.htm

WHAT'S UP AT 1UP.com

EGM.1UP.COM
The Interweb holds many wonders, with the most wondrous being porn. But those delights that aren't naked can be found at 1UP.com. Head to the above URL for videos of *True Crime: New York City* (PS2/XB/GC), plus our Afterthoughts piece on *Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow* (DS), in which the game's creator tells us why one very peculiar boss battle didn't make it into the final version.

CHEATS.1UP.COM
Are you stuck in a dead end? Do you dream of playing more of a game than your pathetic abilities will allow? Sure, we all do, and now you can play like the big boys. We carefully section off this part of 1UP.com for spoilers, cheats, and tips for just about any videogame that is beyond your skill level.

Featured Clubs: Doggystylin' Nintendogs
Does *Nintendogs* have you obsessed with doggy style? Well, all the fly 1UP.com honeys hang out with Miss Kimi (the site's community manager) down at **doggystylin-club.1UP.com.** Catch up with Kimi and her kennel, chat with other *Nintendogs* owners, and feel like less of a social pariah.

Featured Blog: Tokyo Game Show Photos
Words we think of in our jet-lagged stupor when asked about this year's Tokyo Game Show: Booth babes. Sake. Nintendo Revolution. Karaoke. Cosplayers. Vending machines. Clearly, we need to take advantage of the "picture's worth a thousand words" adage. Check out **tgs2005.1UP.com** for the pieces of the story we're far too hungover to express.

Photograph by Hideaki Sakurai/Sakurai Photo

>> IT'S OK TO STAY IN THE WATER—MAJESCO HAS PUSHED BACK THE RELEASE OF *JAWS UNLEASHED* (PS2) UNTIL EARLY NEXT YEAR....

PS2/XB/GC HANDS-ON PREVIEW

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft
Release Date: Dec. 2005

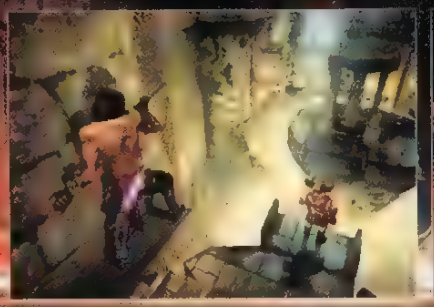
Split personality

Fans of Ubisoft's *Prince of Persia* will be happy to know the series isn't going to be endlessly sequeled until we come to despise it. *The Two Thrones* completes the trilogy kicked off by 2003's *Sands of Time*, sticking close to its predecessors' acrobatic platforming, combat, and time manipulation. This means you won't be seeing radical gameplay changes or, say, an entirely revamped art style. But you should be prepared for one badass new alter ego: the Dark Prince.

This character (who was born, in superhero-like fashion, from a bad sands infection the Prince suffers at the beginning of the game) features his own unique weapon, the daggertail. This powerful chain integrated into his arm has both combat (think metallic flagellation à la *Soul Calibur*'s S&M queen Ivy) and platforming functions. The Dark Prince also has a thoroughly less goody-two-shoes attitude. "He is the physical manifestation of all the Prince's weakest personality traits," says Producer Ben Mattes. He's ruthless, with his own selfish ambitions—in short, he's in it for himself.

And he'll need to be—enemies in *Two Thrones* won't be the cannon fodder the Prince pounded on in last year's *Warrior Within*. "Each of the enemies in this game poses quite a significant challenge to the Prince," says Mattes. "They're stronger, they're smarter, and they're a lot tougher to fight." The Dark Prince, with his kill-em-all weapon and 'tude, will be well equipped to take them on. The relatively pansy-ass Prince, however, might want to make use of another of the game's new features: the speed kill system. Here, you finish off enemies quickly with a series of timed button presses. It's not necessarily easier, but it should add a layer of variety to the fighting throughout the game.

Two Thrones will see a return to *Sands*' symphonic soundtrack style—no more blood-pumping death metal. "The musical direction in *Warrior Within*...people either loved it or...really didn't like it," says Mattes. "We don't want that controversy this time." Still, one new gameplay mechanic, chariot racing, could cause a little grumbling. "We were really wary," says Mattes. "We didn't want people to say, 'Are you making *Prince of Persia* a racing game?'" He promises they've played to their strengths, making the races all about agility—and not the need for speed. —*Jennifer Tsao*



Someone's pissed they got rid of the heavy metal...

>> EA ANNOUNCED IT WILL RELEASE AN ARENA FOOTBALL GAME IN EARLY 2006.... >>

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PS2/XB/GC

SHOW AND TELL: TRUE CRIME: NEW YORK CITY

Cleaning up the city that never sleeps

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Luxoflux
Release Date: November 2005

EGM EXTRAS GO TO EGM.1UP.COM FOR MORE

New York City—it's arguably the greatest metropolis in the world. It's got culture (Broadway), historical landmarks (Statue of Liberty), and quite the articulate community ("f**** you" is often substituted for "hello"). So it comes as no surprise that Activision chose the Big Apple as the backdrop for the second installment in its driving/shooting/fighting series *True Crime*. The move to the East Coast also means a new hero, Marcus Reed, a street hustler turned detective who's out to find his partner's killer. *True Crime* Executive Producer Michael Ward explains the painstaking efforts that went into re-creating New York City, Marcus' morality check, and more. —*Bryan Intihar*

Building Blocks

Michael Ward: "We tried to make New York authentic. So when you go to Harlem, the cars that you see and the people who you meet are different from those in the financial district. And not only is the whole city re-created here, but virtually every block has at least one building that you can enter. You can duck into places like nightclubs, strip joints, and pizza parlors. You'll find random crimes happening in these places, as well."

I'll Scratch Your Back...

MW: "Informants will give you info on the case, but it comes at a cost. When you meet up with the cab driver, for example, he'll ask you to use his cab to collect fares. Afterwards, he'll give you the clue so you can pick up the case."

There Goes the Neighborhood

MW: "You are responsible for keeping the streets clean. Over time, if you neglect your duties too long, neighborhoods will start to decay. You'll see buildings physically change—lights burn out in the windows, and instead of windows you'll see boards. Then you'll see graffiti on the boards. The city will actually turn against you. So you gotta keep up with your regular cop duties while trying to work on these four crime families to find out who killed your partner."

Photograph by Getty

Excessive Force

MW: "If you're paying attention, you'll see lots of things in the environment that you can use. In the museum, you can sneak up behind the guard, grab him, and use the sacrificial altar [to kill him]."

>> *TRUE CRIME* EXECUTIVE PRODUCER MICHAEL WARD SAYS THAT THE NEXT GAME IN THE SERIES WILL ALSO TAKE PLACE IN NEW YORK CITY.

New *True Crime* hero Marcus takes jaywalking way too seriously.

Bad boys always play with the best weapons.

Good Cop, Bad Cop

MW: "In a lot of the environments you'll be able to pick up evidence, like drugs, after you've solved the case. Now, as a cop, you have a choice: You can take the drugs back to the police precinct, which gets the drugs off the streets, and that way Marcus can get promoted faster and gain access to better vehicles and police-issued weaponry. On the other hand, you can also go to the pawnshops and sell the drugs on the black market to get cash, which allows you to access fancier cars and some of the illegal weapons like rocket launchers and flamethrowers. The trade-off there is that the drugs go back into circulation and you don't reduce the urban decay or the neighborhood crime statistics."

WTF?!

For the most part, the first *True Crime* was grounded in reality. Then about three-quarters of the way through came a puzzling detour that included floating demon heads, dragons, and a 342-year-old Chinese man. "The first game was in development for a long time, and I think when it first started it was kind of *Big Trouble in Little China*-esque," explains Ward. "Over time it evolved, but there were some legacy things that got [into the final game]." Ward assures us that the dev team is keeping the supernatural out of *True Crime: New York City*. Good decision.

MARCUS REED, HOWEVER, MAY NOT BE *TRUE CRIME 3*'S MAIN CHARACTER.... >>

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Xbox 360 / HOPES ON PAPER

QUAKE 4

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Raven
Release Date: "When it's done" (presumably late November)

Fighting the good fight

It's a little bit *Halo* (gung-ho space marines teaming up to take on intelligent aliens). It's a little bit *Doom 3* (creeps jumping out at you, trying to make you soil your boxers). It's even a little bit *Chronicles of Riddick* (riding around in a heavily armed mech, stomping fools left and right). Even though *Quake*'s been pumping out rockets and hot lead long before gamers even heard of an "Xbox," the newest chapter in the first-person-shooter series sure draws from some nifty modern influences.

In a short single-player demo of *Quake 4*, we saw our marine squad in total disarray. Apparently, during Earth's invasion of the alien home planet of Stroggos, a certain something hit the fan. We start off outside of a strogg facility with someone barking orders at us, telling us to meet up with another group of grunts who are already inside. We pull out a pistol and enter the enemy stronghold solo. We find the soldiers, only to find out that one's in critical condition. They ask us to go back out to find a medic. It feels like a waste of time, but we retrace our steps back outdoors, grab the first qualified doc we can find, and then head back in. But this time, we see a shadowy figure quickly race across the industrial, pipe-filled hallway. It disappears before we engage, so we walk down the hallway a little more cautiously, gun in hand, waiting for the worst. But suddenly, a strogg bursts through the wall of pipes to our immediate left in a *Doom 3*–worthy scene and lunges for us. It catches us off guard, but we take it down before it can kill the medic we're escorting. We survive...and push ahead.

Throughout the game, you'll experience these seemingly real, impromptu wartime scenarios. You may be escorting whiny, helpless frag baits because they're needed somewhere else on the battlefield, or you may be teaming up with a tough-as-nails marine for double the firepower...and attitude. But make no mistake. This isn't a buddy-cop adventure. *Quake 4* is still a fairly traditional first-person shooter through and through: If it moves, slithers, or jumps out at you...shoot it, whether you have a partner by your side or not.

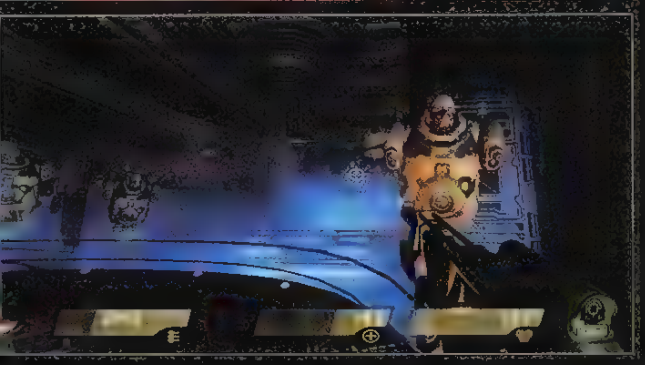
Later on in the game, you'll be captured by the stroggs to be turned into one of them. Your fellow soldiers will save you at the last minute, but not before the strogg prick and poke and fill you with alien modifications. You will develop new superhuman powers, but not all of your marine buddies will trust you now (as you'll hear in the game), you half-breed freak.

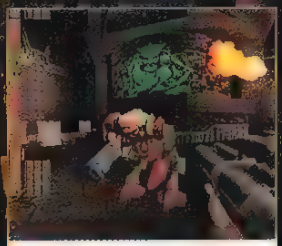
When we played *Quake 4*, it didn't outrightly impress us...at first. Despite the awesome pedigree we listed at the start of this preview, the game still seems rather bland—it's mostly stuff we've seen and played before. Plus, we were hoping for more out of a next-generation game, graphicswise. But it wasn't until we compared it to *Doom 3* on the current Xbox (and that's one fine-looking game) that we could appreciate *Quake 4*'s subtle beauty. Everything looks so crisp, sharp, and detailed—we didn't want to go back to Xbox 360's antiquated brother after this. As of this writing, we have yet to try out multiplayer, but our friends at *Computer Gaming World* say it looks really good, at least on the PC side. It's essentially a gussied-up *Quake III Arena*, which means lots of speed, bounce pads, and rocket jumping. But will that be as fun when you're playing with an Xbox 360 controller as opposed to the more responsive keyboard-and-mouse combo?

—*Dan "Slice" Hsu*

Storywise, *Quake 4* is the direct sequel to *Quake II*. But its multiplayer is based on *Quake III Arena*, which is a very good thing.

>> PORTABLE FANTASIES—SQUARE ENIX ANNOUNCED THAT NEXT YEAR IT WILL RELEASE A GRAPHICALLY UPGRADED VERSION OF *FINAL*





Old School

Quake 4 comes packed with one impressive bonus feature: a full version of first-person-shooting classic *Quake II*, redone and fully optimized for the Xbox 360 (PC screen shown above). This face-lifted oldie will feature splitscreen, co-op, and system-link multiplayer modes, but no online play over Xbox Live. (Will anyone care? We doubt it.) The developers did tell us that people who play all the way through this *Quake II* will earn special Xbox 360 achievement awards to boost their public gamer rankings. Now that's hardcore.

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THE SALES CHARTS FOR AUGUST 2005

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES

August: A month full of Maddenisms, pigskin, and pissed-off girlfriends.

1. **Madden NFL 06** • PS2 • EA Sports
2. **Madden NFL 06** • XB • EA Sports
3. **NCAA Football 06** • PS2 • EA Sports
4. **Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike** • XB • Ubisoft
5. **Nintendogs: Dachshund and Friends** • DS • Nintendo
6. **Pokémon Emerald** • GBA • Nintendo
7. **Madden NFL 06** • GC • EA Sports
8. **Star Wars Battlefront** • PS2 • LucasArts
9. **Nintendogs: Lab and Friends** • DS • Nintendo
10. **Halo 2 Map Pack** • XB • Microsoft

TOP 10 PS2

1. Madden NFL 06
2. NCAA Football 06
3. Star Wars Battlefront
4. Lego Star Wars
5. Burnout 3: Takedown
6. Delta Force: Black Hawk Down
7. Destroy All Humans!
8. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
9. Medal of Honor: European Assault
10. Darkwatch

TOP 10 XBOX

1. Madden NFL 06
2. Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike
3. Halo 2 Map Pack
4. Delta Force: Black Hawk Down
5. NCAA Football 06
6. Darkwatch
7. Burnout 3: Takedown
8. Star Wars Battlefront
9. Halo 2
10. The Incredible Hulk: Ult. Dest.

TOP 10 GAMECUBE

1. Madden NFL 06
2. Harvest Moon: Another Wnd. Life
3. Super Smash Bros. Melee
4. Super Mario Sunshine
5. Pokémon Colosseum
6. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
7. Sonic Gems Collection
8. Animal Crossing
9. Kirby Air Ride
10. The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker

TOP 10 PORTABLES

1. Nintendogs: Dachshund • DS
2. Pokémon Emerald • GBA
3. Nintendogs: Labrador • DS
4. Nintendogs: Chihuahua • DS
5. Dragon Ball GT: Trans. • GBA
6. Advance Wars: Dual Strike • DS
7. Midnight Club 3: DUB Ed. • PSP
8. Coded Arms • PSP
9. Lego Star Wars • GBA
10. Disney's Kim Possible 3 • GBA

TOP 10 RENTALS

FOR THE WEEK ENDING 9/11/05

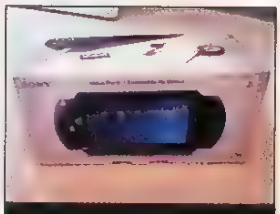
1. Madden NFL 06 • PS2
2. Incredible Hulk: Ult. Dest. • PS2
3. Madden NFL 06 • XB
4. Incredible Hulk: Ult. Dest. • XB
5. Rainbow Six: Lockdown • XB
6. Midnight Club 3: DUB Ed. • PS2
7. NCAA Football 06 • PS2
8. Destroy All Humans! • PS2
9. Delta Force: BHD • PS2
10. Delta Force: Black Hawk Down • XB

Source: Blockbuster Video

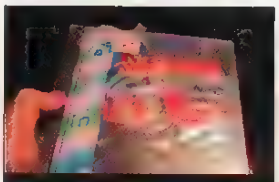
ON THE AUCTION BLOCK

EBay: A place for buying gaming oddities...and where your mom sells itchy sweaters to strangers.

Item: Richie Rich didn't make it to the 1990 Nintendo World Championships, but now he can own a **cartridge** from it.
Winning Bid: $6,100



Item: Read this carefully: It's a **PSP box**. Just the box. No actual system inside. Just. The. Box.
Winning Bid: $130! (Someone didn't pay attention.)



Item: *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima made the **rare Sega CD game *Snatcher***. This copy's a virgin (as in never opened, perv).
Winning Bid: $162

Item: Do you love the characters from the Xbox RPG hit *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*? Now you can play with a **handmade Darth Revan action dolly!**
Winning Bid: $48

>> NEXT FEBRUARY, SONY ONLINE WILL RELEASE *FIELD COMMANDER*, A TURN-BASED STRATEGY GAME FOR THE PLAYSTATION PORTABLE....

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GAME INFORMER

"8.5 OUT OF 10"
PSM

"85 OUT OF 100"
PC GAMER

"8.5/9.0/8.5 OUT OF 10"
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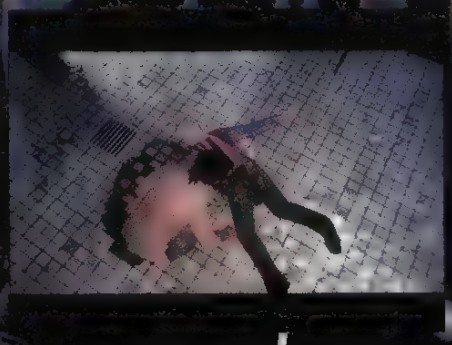

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NEXT-GEN UPDATE XBOX 360

FAST-FORWARD

We look ahead to the next round of big **Xbox 360** games (and answer any lingering questions you may have before buying Microsoft's upcoming console)

Don't dare tell Microsoft that patience is a virtue. Instead of waiting until 2006 to launch a new console like hardware competitors Sony and Nintendo, Bill Gates' gaming crew will be the first out of the next-gen gates when it releases Xbox 360 on November 22. And in case you didn't know already, you'll have two different packages to choose from: a $300, bare-bones core unit that comes with the basic console and controller, or the premium bundle that—for an extra 100 smackers—includes a hard drive, a wireless controller, and a few other welcome accessories (Microsoft expects more demand for the deluxe bundle and will produce more of those). On the games front, the first-person shoot-em-up *Perfect Dark Zero* (which keeps looking better—see pg. 64), *Project Gotham Racing 3*, and a handful of EA Sports titles will lead the 360 charge.

But enough about the early days of the console—you probably want to know about the returns you'll see on this $300 or $400 investment in 2006 and beyond. The console maker recently unveiled some future 360-exclusive titles, including the sci-fi role-playing game *Mass Effect* from *Jade Empire* maker BioWare, the god-versus-machines action game *Too Human*, and the *Grand Theft Auto*–esque *Crackdown*, while the monster-filled shooter *Gears of War* showed us once again just how good the system's games can look. Peter Moore, the corporate vice president of worldwide marketing and publishing for Xbox, also tells us that RPG heavyweight Square Enix, which never supported the company's first console, is readying more than just the massively multiplayer *Final Fantasy XI* for 360. ("Yes, some things are coming," Moore says.) And what about that little game called...oh yeah, *Halo 3*? Well, the only news concerning Master Chief's next outing came from Chief Xbox Officer Robbie Bach, who told the IDG news service that the first-person shooter would ship "when it's ready," not necessarily in time to combat the PlayStation 3 launch (which Gates said in *Time* magazine last May). So can these newly announced games help fill the big *Halo* void? Turn the page....➤

—*Shane Bettenhausen, Crispin Boyer, Bryan Intihar*, and *Mark MacDonald*

>> *LORD OF THE RINGS* DIRECTOR PETER JACKSON WILL ACT AS EXECUTIVE PRODUCER OF THE *HALO* MOVIE, DUE OUT IN SUMMER 2007.... >>

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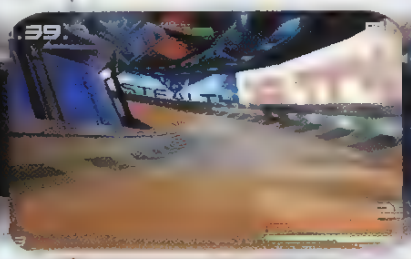

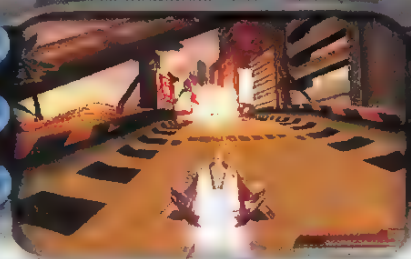

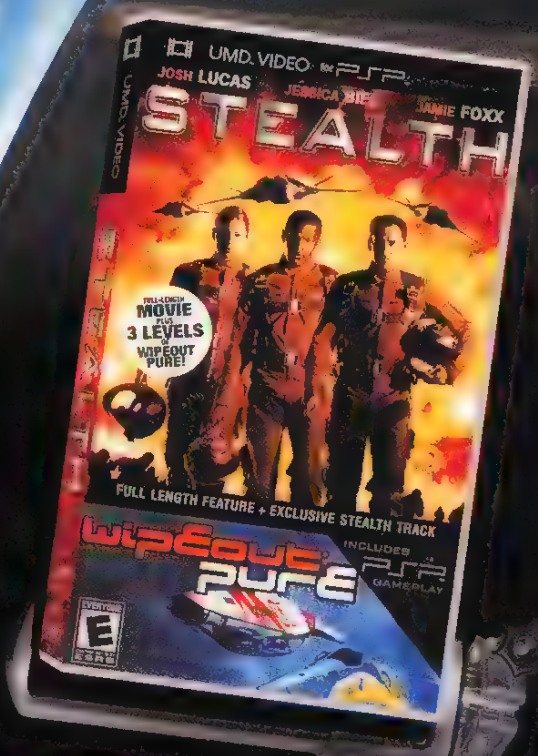

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NEXT-GEN UPDATE XBOX 360 (CONT.)

Mass Effect

Microsoft • Late 2006/early 2007

Most next-gen developers like to brag about their four-story-tall monsters, 20-mile-wide levels, and thousands of enemies onscreen at once. But what gets BioWare cofounder Greg Zeschuk most excited about his Xbox 360 game, *Mass Effect*? Facial expressions. "Instead of having someone say, 'I'm angry, so I'm going to leave!' we can just show them getting upset before walking off."

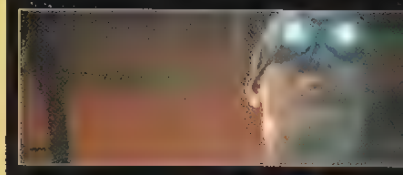
Maybe that doesn't sound quite as sexy on the back of a game box, but as any fan of *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Jade Empire* will tell you, conversations aren't just exposition in a BioWare role-playing game. What you say and how you act can change the entire game, an aspect the developer plans to focus on in *Mass Effect*. "We want the player's actions to affect the world more than ever before," says Project Director Casey Hudson, "to affect change across the entire galaxy in a meaningful way."

As the first part of an epic 360-exclusive trilogy, *Mass Effect* follows the 23rd-century travels of a human military starship and its commander (that's you). After finally mastering space travel, mankind has learned that not only is it not alone in the universe, but that it's behind the curve. Aliens—including entire races of robots—are far more advanced...and not always friendly.

So, obviously, the game won't be all chitchat. You'll fight in real-time tactical battles, giving general orders to your two A.I. teammates while aiming and firing your own weapons—similar to a squad-based shooter, according to BioWare. No word yet on how tall your enemies will be.

Splinter Cell 4

Poor Sam Fisher—the gray-haired spy veteran just can't get a year off, as Ubisoft recently announced that *Splinter Cell 4* will sneak its way onto the Xbox 360 (in addition to the current-gen consoles) sometime next spring. A short teaser trailer confirmed that this upcoming edition in the stealth-action series will include both an offline solo campaign and online play. It showed footage of what looked like *Splinter Cell*'s innovative "spy versus mercs" multiplayer mode; the segment featured a spy scampering along a building's girders, a merc (who dons a futuristic-looking faceguard) patrolling below, and a scuffle between the two. Pretty standard stuff, but then the trailer ended with the phrase, "You have no idea what's coming." Sam gets killed? You play as his daughter? A massively multiplayer online mode? What could it be?



XFAQ 360

Pricey new games? Useless old peripherals? With the 360's launch looming, we enter the lightning round of frequently asked Q's...

Q: I heard 360 games cost more. No way!

A: Yes way. Although games published by Microsoft will cost the same ($50) as Xbox 1 titles (except for $60 goodie-packed special-edition 360 titles), third-party games will run you 10 bucks more. Old-schoolers will remember a similar pricing structure for Nintendo 64 games.

Q: Will my current Xbox Live membership continue on the 360? How do I transfer it over?

A: Sure will, and transferring your account is easy. Sign up for Microsoft Passport (www.passport.net) and link your Xbox 1 Gamertag to your Passport account at www.xbox.com/en-us/live (follow the "Get Linked!" link at the right of the page). Then just enter your Passport e-mail address and Gamertag when first connecting your 360 online and you're done. You don't have to sign up this way—it just subtracts a few steps from the process.

XBOX LIVE

Q: How do I play Xbox 1 games on 360?

A: After inserting an Xbox disc into your 360 for the first time, the system will automatically connect to Xbox Live and search for the latest emulation software to see if the game is backward compatible. It'll download the software to the hard drive (which you need to access the backward-compatibility feature) and begin the game. If you already have the software installed, the game will boot up like normal.

Q: How will we know which games are backward compatible? ➤

NEXT YEAR, ELECTRONIC ARTS WILL RELEASE XBOX 360 VERSIONS OF *BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT* AND *BURNOUT REVENGE*....

One Wants to Free His People...

NEXT-GEN UPDATE XBOX 360 (CONT.)

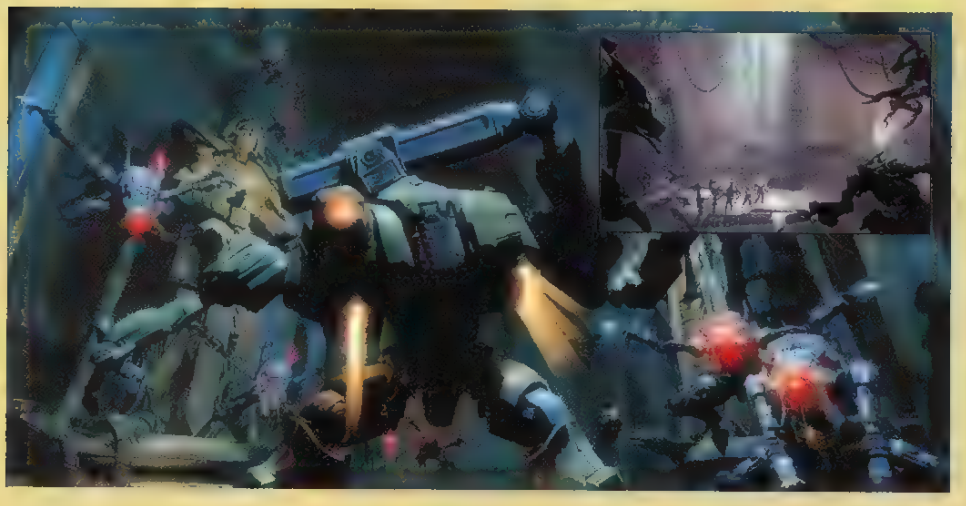
Too Human

Microsoft • Late 2006

Developer Silicon Knights may only have three console titles to its name, but President Denis Dyack says they've been a crash course in game design, taught by the masters. Partnering with Nintendo on *Eternal Darkness* (GC), they learned about gameplay and camera movement; corroborating with Konami on *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* (GC) taught them about cinematic presentation and high production values.

The developer's chance to finally show off what it's learned comes in the form of *Too Human*, the first in an action-game trilogy that pits you, as a cybernetic god, against a horde of evil machines threatening to wipe out mankind. After customizing your character and outfitting him with upgradeable implants, you'll take on hundreds of enemies at a time with melee and weapon-based attacks, using a custom dual-analog-stick control system (the camera is automatic) that Dyack promises will impress. "We worked with the Hollywood [stunt guys] from *Hero* and *Bulletproof Monk*," he says, "not just motion-capturing them, but sitting down and analyzing how they did martial arts." The developers used this knowledge to make a dynamic combo system that will allow players to string together different moves while still looking incredibly fluid and smooth.

Though Dyack promises the game is "more than combat—much more," he isn't willing to talk about anything else, making only vague mentions of sprawling levels and a major online component. ("It's integral to the game," he says.) "We're talking about 50 percent of the game right now," says Dyack. "We don't want to overwhelm everyone." Looks like he's learned something else from Nintendo and Konami—keep your secrets.



Perfect Dark Zero Update

We'll love it; we'll love it not. The gaming public's expectations for Rare's first-person shooter have gone back and forth from optimism to skepticism more often than a ball at the Chinese ping-pong championships. Multiplayer was never in serious doubt; *Zero*'s is so ambitious, so filled with weapons, modes, vehicles, and cool new ideas, that it seemed everyone found something to like (count on it to be the most popular online game from the 360's launch on into the foreseeable future). But what about single player? The screens were hit or miss, and Rare, as usual, wasn't talking.

Finally, we can rest easy. After playing through two levels of the game, we can say the graphics are good, the controls solid, and the gameplay refreshing—especially the amazingly extensive co-op mode (splitscreen or over Xbox Live). The other good news is that *Perfect Dark Zero* should be out at the same time as the system, making it (along with *Project Gotham Racing 3*) one of the safest bets on launch day.

XFAQ 360 (cont.)

➤ **A:** Xbox.com will host a list of all backward-compatible games.

Q: Can an Xbox 360 gamer play an Xbox 1 game online against someone playing it on the original Xbox?

A: Yep. You can even exchange messages and invites as if you were both playing on the old system.

Q: Can I bring my Xbox 1 saves and downloadable content to my 360 to continue playing those titles?

A: Get ready to start those games over: You can't transfer saves and downloads from Xbox to the Xbox 360. Premium content, however, for *Halo 2*, *Project Gotham Racing 2*, *MechAssault*, *MechAssault 2*, and the *Links* titles—plus all free downloadable content for original Xbox titles—will be available in the Xbox Live Marketplace at no cost, regardless of whether you're using the free Silver level of membership or the $50-per-year Gold membership.

Q: Will the 360's custom-soundtrack feature support music purchased from iTunes?

A: Negative. Songs bought from iTunes use a proprietary format that the 360 won't recognize. The console will play songs ripped off of CDs to iTunes, but you'll need to download a free codec through the 360's dashboard.

Q: Will Xbox 1 games that support custom soundtracks be able to access the music on my 360's hard drive, an attached MP3 player, or my network?

A: Unfortunately, no. Xbox 1 games won't have access to the 360's custom-soundtrack features.

Q: Since the 360's wireless controllers "bind" to the system automatically (versus you manually selecting a channel), is it possible to get interference from the neighbors?

A: The Xbox 360 wireless protocol is robust enough to handle interference from minor appliances like microwaves, cordless phones, and wireless networks, all the way up to the chaotic multi-console, multicontroller environment of a LAN party. ➤

TIME TO SHOOT NAZIS AGAIN—ID SOFTWARE (*DOOM 3*) IS CURRENTLY DEVELOPING A *CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN* GAME FOR XBOX 360....

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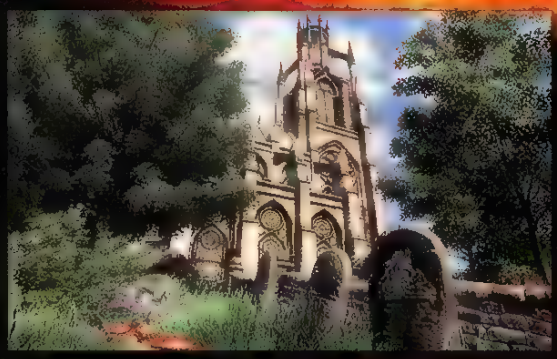

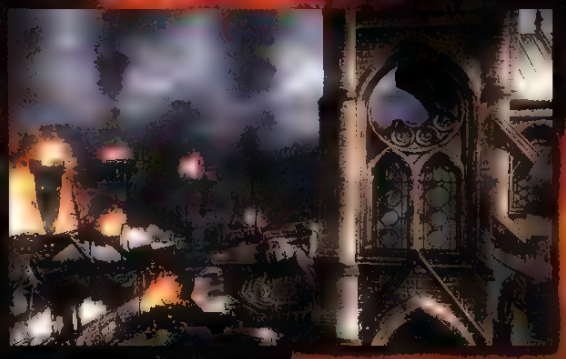

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NEXT-GEN UPDATE XBOX 360 CONT.

Crackdown

Microsoft • Fall 2006

When your résumé highlights include helping create the blockbuster *Grand Theft Auto* franchise, you know expectations will be high. That's the case for David Jones, who's opened development house Real Time Worlds and hopes to have just as great success with *Crackdown*. On the surface, the game bears a resemblance to his former work, featuring a wide-open metropolis and the ability to drive anywhere and shoot anything. Yet unlike in *GTA*, you'll play the role of the good guy; it's your job as a muscle-bound cop to clean up the streets (with excessive force) that 21 kingpins have so wonderfully corrupted. *Crackdown* features a character upgrade system that'll enable you to selectively improve your stats so, say, you can eventually have the strength to toss trucks or drive some tricked-out vehicles. But what has us more excited is the game's online co-op mode, in which you and a friend can save the city together over Xbox Live.

Gears of War

Microsoft • Fall 2006

Unquestionably the prettiest contestant in the Xbox 360 beauty pageant, Epic's postapocalyptic shooter offers a glimpse of what truly next-gen games can look like on Microsoft's console. When *Gears'* hulking armored soldiers traipse through a midnight thunderstorm in a bombed-out city, the game manages to make many of its 360 brethren look downright shabby. But sexy looks only go so far: Can the gameplay keep up? So far, the third-person shooting action seems fairly straightforward, with over-the-shoulder aiming, some environmental puzzles, and a standard-issue mine cart ride. Gamers expecting a chaotic, *Unreal Tournament*–style run-and-gun experience might scratch their heads at the slower, almost *Resident Evil 4*–esque action here. But then again, who can resist a *RE4*-inspired romp with Xbox Live co-op play?

XFAQ 360 (cont.)

Q: How will gamers without hard drives get game-fixing patches? And what if downloadable content (like new levels) or patches are too big for memory cards down the line?

A: An 8-megabyte portion of the memory unit (and 256-megabyte chunk of the hard drive) is reserved for system use to make sure 360 owners can download mandatory game updates and always connect to Xbox Live. Note that the minimum storage requirement for connecting to Live is a memory unit, so cheapskate 360 gamers who opt not to get the hard drive will still be able to take their systems online.

Q: Can I play unpatched games over Live?

A: No. Only the newest and most updated versions of each game will be playable over Xbox Live.

Q: Any adapters coming out so that I can use my Xbox 1 controllers when playing Xbox 1 games on 360?

A: Nope, but the 360 controller is similar to the original Xbox pad.

Q: Do any of my existing Xbox 1 video cables work with 360?

A: No. Xbox 1 AV cables will not work with Xbox 360. The good news: The premium hard-drive 360 package comes with high-definition cables. The bad news: They're not packed with the cheaper core system, so you'll need to spend a whopping $40 if you want to buy them later.

Q: What about Xbox 1 peripherals like steering wheels or DDR dance-pads? They useless on the 360, too?

A: Unfortunately, yeah. You'll need to spring for all-new Xbox 360–specific peripherals. ➤

■ **Waste of good metal: Xbox 1 peripherals, such as the pricey *Steel Battalion* controller, won't connect to your 360.**

>> NEXT-GEN CROTCH ROCKETS—*MOTOGP 2006: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY* WILL RACE TO THE XBOX 360 SOMETIME NEXT YEAR.... >>

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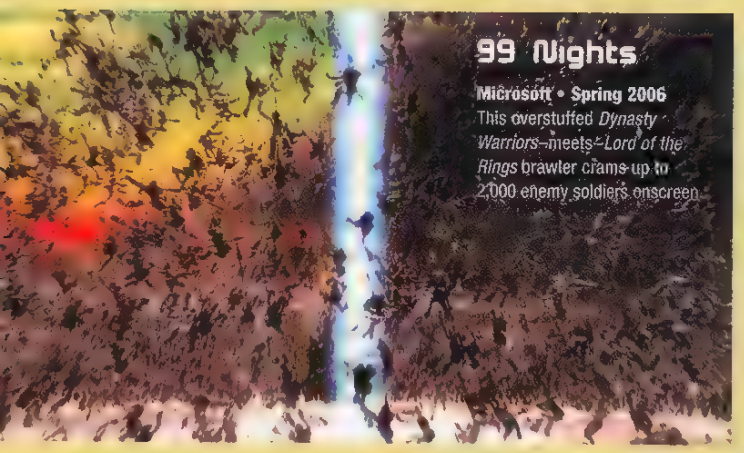
NEXT-GEN UPDATE XBOX 360 (CONT.)

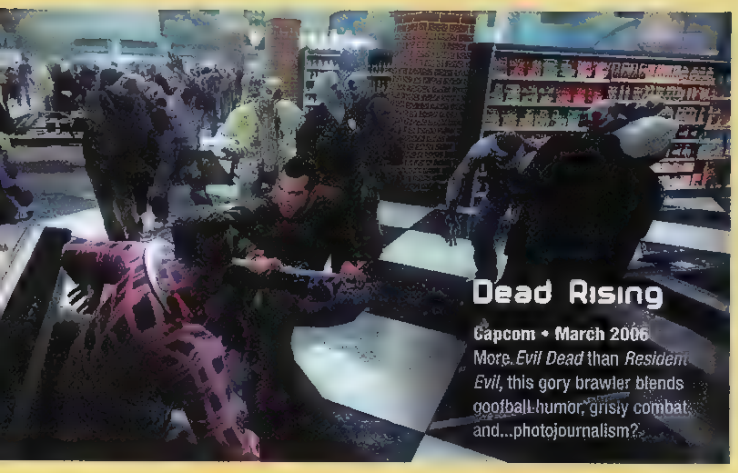


99 Nights

Microsoft • Spring 2006
This overstuffed *Dynasty Warriors*-meets-*Lord of the Rings* brawler crams up to 2,000 enemy soldiers onscreen.

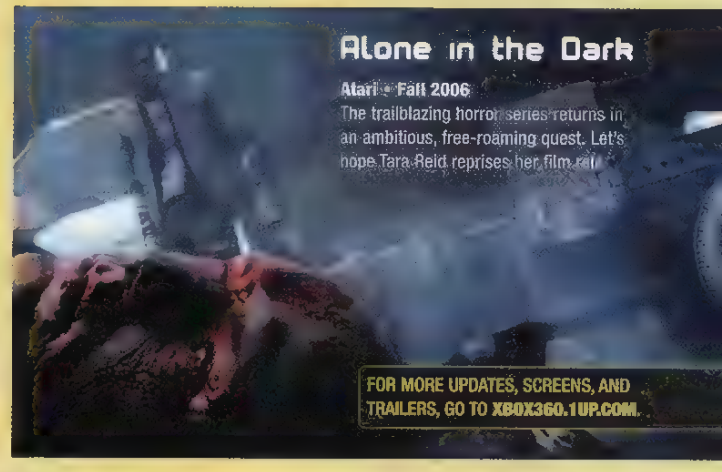
Chromehounds

Sega • Spring 2006
An action/sim hybrid from the *Armored Core* guys, offering 12-player Xbox Live mecha melees.



Dead Rising

Capcom • March 2006
More *Evil Dead* than *Resident Evil*, this gory brawler blends football humor, grisly combat and...photojournalism?



Alone in the Dark

Atari • Fall 2006
The trailblazing horror series returns in an ambitious, free-roaming quest. Let's hope Tara Reid reprises her film role.

FOR MORE UPDATES, SCREENS, AND TRAILERS, GO TO **XBOX360.1UP.COM**.

XFAQ 360 (cont.)

Q: What about my Xbox 1 wireless networking adapter?

A: Fear not: You can use your old adapter (right) on the 360.

Q: So what's all this "HD era" business I keep hearing about?

A: When Microsoft execs unveiled the 360 earlier in the year, they claimed it would usher in a future in which console gaming would deliver high-definition sights and sounds, as well as an always-connected online community.

Q: Er, does that mean I need a high-def television to play 360 games?

A: No, but your games will sure look nicer. All Xbox 360 games will support 720p resolution at the very least, and developers have the option of creating titles in 1080i, too.

Q: Whoa, whoa...slow down. What's 720p? 1080i?

A: The numbers refer to high-definition TV resolutions: 1280x720 and 1920x1080, both much crisper than the 640x480 resolution of your normal boob tube. The letters after the numbers stand for "progressive scan" or "interlaced display." Interlace scanning splits a TV frame into two images called fields, and then takes two passes to draw the full image on your screen (one field per pass). Progressive scan, on the other hand, draws the entire frame in one pass instead of splitting it into two, making for a smoother picture.

Q: Hmm...but my HDTV doesn't support 720p. It goes from 480p right to 1080i.

A: Don't worry. The Xbox 360's built-in video scaler will adjust its signal to match your television's display mode (for instance, converting 720p to run on your television's 1080i display). Ultimately, you're fine with the HDTV you have and shouldn't upgrade until 1080p display modes are more widely supported. That's the next realm of high definition, one that the PlayStation 3 promises to support. But we'll leave that for another FAQ.

—With contributions from Kelly Rickards

>> THE MAN OF STEEL IS BACK—NEXT SUMMER, *SUPERMAN RETURNS* WILL FLY TO THE CURRENT CONSOLES AND THE XBOX 360.... >>

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GAMING ON THE GO-GO

What's coming to a handheld near you in 2006

Metal Gear Solid 4 for PlayStation 3. The unveiling of the Nintendo Revolution controller. More Xbox 360 games. This year's Tokyo Game Show definitely had a next-gen vibe. But that's not all; the show also acted as a venue for companies to display their big handheld games for 2006. So as we near year two of the portable war, here are some of the PSP and DS titles that'll help determine which system comes out ahead. (Note: Not all of these games have been confirmed for the U.S. market, but we expect announcements and firm release dates soon.)

—*Bryan Intihar*

Loco Roco

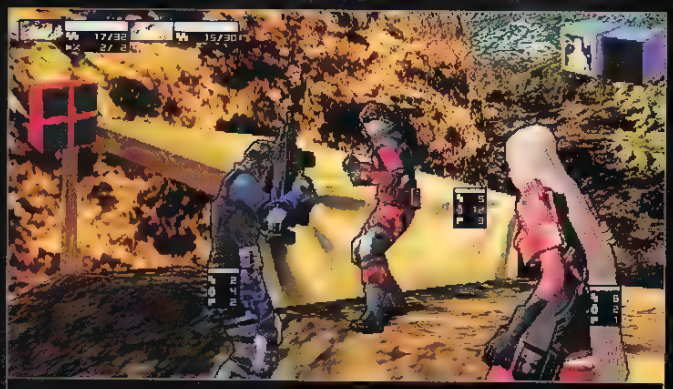
Sony CEA • PSP • Fall 2006

Looking for the next *Katamari*? Enter *Loco Roco*, a very quirky side-scrolling platformer in which you play as an orange liquid blob. By using the handheld's two trigger buttons to tilt the game's landscape (press them at the same time to jump over obstacles), you'll try to complete each stage with the biggest blob possible. Sounds a bit odd, right? Well, so did the idea of rolling a katamari ball around and picking up all sorts of strange doohickeys.

Street Fighter Alpha 3: Double Upper

Capcom • PSP • Spring 2006

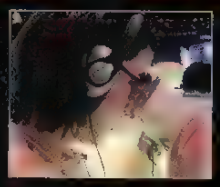
Historically, fighting games haven't fared very well on handhelds. Capcom hopes to buck that trend, as the publisher will bring its legendary franchise to the PSP. While this one's essentially a port of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* (PS1/Sat/DC), it does feature four new characters. And in terms of multiplayer, *Double Upper* will support only local Wi-Fi, so forget about online tourneys with your cross-country buddies. Lame.



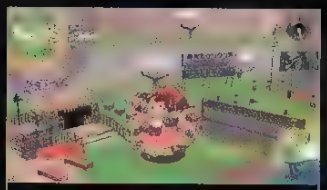
Metal Gear Acid 2

Konami • PSP • January 2006

Solid Snake must have a serious thing for the PSP—this marks his second appearance on the handheld in less than a year. While *Acid 2* remains a card-collecting strategy game, it now sports brightly colored, comic-book-style visuals. It also comes packed with a scope peripheral, a piece of plastic that goes on top of the PSP screen and acts like a pair of 3D glasses...except it works much better.



The 3D scope peripheral: less embarrassing than yelling at your DS in public.



My My Katamari

Namco • PSP • Spring 2006

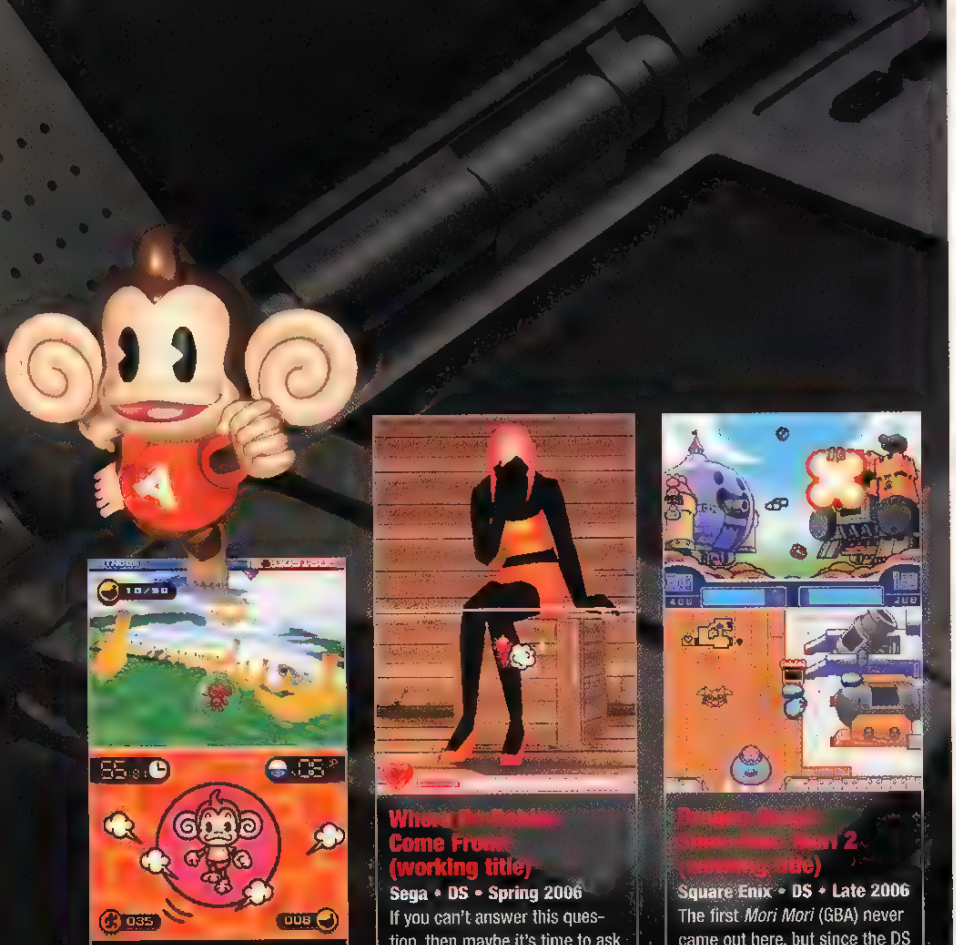
Sure, the PSP has enough crap on it already, but at least we don't mind picking up *Katamari*'s junk. This weirder-than-weird franchise rolls onto the handheld with the same stylish visuals and peppy tunes as the two console editions. The controls, however, still need a lot of work: Right now, steering the giant katamari ball with the system's D-pad and four face buttons (rather than the console versions' dual analog stick mechanic) feels really awkward and slow. Also, the camera, which you adjust using the shoulder buttons, isn't as responsive as we would like.

Extreme Ghosts 'n Goblins (working title)

Capcom • PSP • Spring 2006

Before the days of Maximo, Sir Arthur made it fashionable to wear boxer shorts on the battlefield. Now he and his underwear return to the gaming scene much like they left it: starring in an old-school, side-scrolling action game. Capcom promises this edition—like all the games in the series—will be *really* tough. Luckily, Arthur will come equipped with the added abilities of double jumping, shooting vertically, and transforming into different creatures so that he can complete certain objectives (like changing into a frog to leap over a lava pit).

>> MORE DUAL-SCREEN ROLEPLAYING—IN JAPAN, SQUARE ENIX RECENTLY REVEALED *CHILDREN OF MANA* FOR THE NINTENDO DS.



Super Monkey Ball DS

Sega • DS • Spring 2006

This simple yet addictive banana collector makes its way to Nintendo's dual-screen machine, where you'll use the DS' touch screen to guide your monkey through a monstrous number of stages. Aside from the single-player game, this portable version of *Super Monkey Ball* will have six multiplayer modes, including race (think *Mario Kart*) and air hockey (meh).

Where Do Babies Come From? (working title)

Sega • DS • Spring 2006

If you can't answer this question, then maybe it's time to ask your folks about the birds and the bees. Anyway, this sequel to the strange DS launch title *Feel the Magic: XY/XX* is similar to the original: Master all the fast-acting minigames in order to gain the affection of a lady friend. *Where Do Babies Come From?* doubles the number of twitchy events, such as rubbing lotion on a woman's back and shooting a herd of stampeding bulls. And this one also introduces four-person multiplayer action. Orgy, anyone?

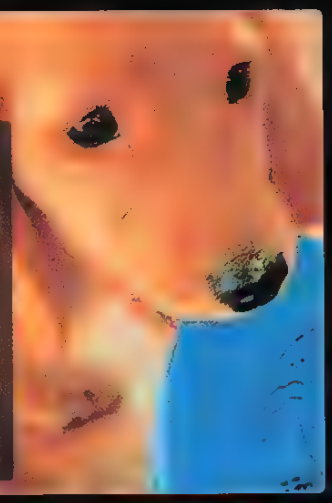
[illegible] 2 (working title)

Square Enix • DS • Late 2006

The first *Mori Mori* (GBA) never came out here, but since the DS is hurting for role-playing games, we've got a good feeling about the sequel coming Stateside. In the main game, the handheld's top screen displays the world map and stats. In multiplayer action (dubbed battle), though, it'll show huge cannons, and it's your job to collect rocks (which serve as ammo for the weapons) so that you can destroy the opponent's base. We'll stick with the single-player RPG, thank you very much.

BY THE NUMBERS

Puppy power



39	Percentage of U.S. households that own at least one dog (according to the APPMA's 2003/2004 National Pet Owners Survey)
1.5 Million	Number of *Nintendogs* (DS) copies sold worldwide since its debut in Japan last April
150	Price (in U.S. dollars) of the *Nintendogs* bundle, which includes a teal or pink Nintendo DS system and the "Best Friends" edition of *Nintendogs*
72	Percentage of owned dogs in the United States that have been spayed or neutered, thus making Bob Barker very happy

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SOCOM 3
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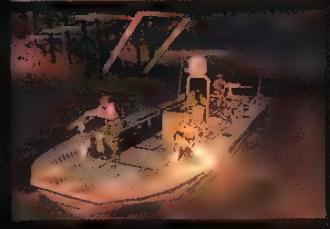

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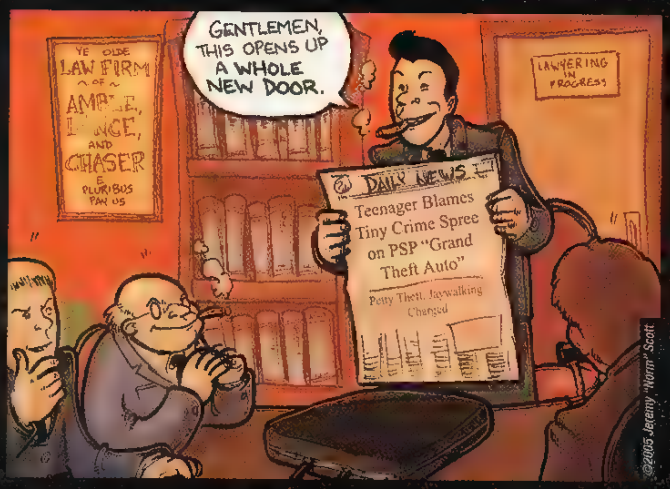


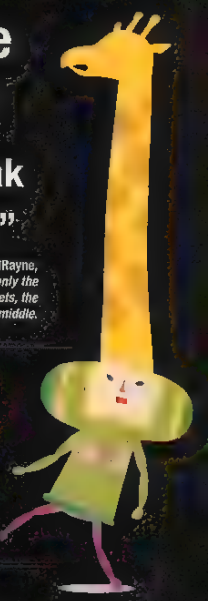
©2005 Jeremy "Horm" Scott

"It's gonna be **like an interactive thing.**"

—Actress Jessica Alba (Fantastic Four) *discusses the philosophy behind the Korean mobile-phone game she's helping design*

"I'm still happy with [the film version of] *Alone in the Dark*. I think the only weak part is maybe Tara Reid's acting."

—Videogame movie director Uwe Boll (BloodRayne, House of the Dead). *We would agree, adding only the script, the special effects, the other actors, the sets, the plot, and the ending. Also, the beginning. And the middle.*



"I had a hard time trying to keep the secret. I almost went mad."

—Metal Gear Solid *creator Hideo Kojima talks about being the first developer outside Nintendo to see the company's unique one-handed Revolution controller*

"Games can be as stupid as they like, as long as they are fun."

—Katamari Damacy *creator Keita Takahashi*

"I think Nintendo's on the right track."

—Game designer Tetsuya Mizuguchi (Lumines, Meteos) *just after he saw the new controller*

"When I look at [the two versions of the Xbox 360 for sale], I think it just confuses the audience. So I think we wouldn't take that strategy. We wouldn't create confusion."

—Sony Europe VP Phil Harrison *reminds us all how intuitive the PS2's optional online adapter and hard drive are for the average consumer*

"My first reaction was, 'Are they crazy?'"

—Ted Price, *president of historically Sony-exclusive developer* Insomniac (Ratchet & Clank), *echoes the sentiment of pretty much everyone else upon seeing the Revolution controller*

"You're looking at the key to winning the console war."

—Metal Gear Solid 4 *character Otacon, in that game's debut trailer for the PS3*

"The fact that they feel the need to have [*Metal Gear Solid*] tell you that [the PS3 is] powerful...that could be seen as a sign of worry, or weakness."

—Microsoft Xbox VP Peter Moore, *in full spin*

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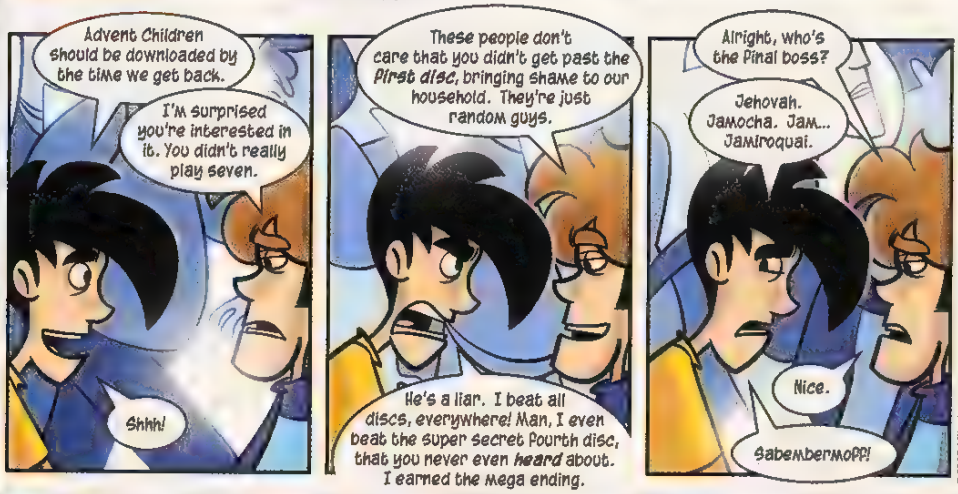

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QUOTATION SOURCES FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, STARTING WITH LEFT COLUMN: EGM INTERVIEW, EGM INTERVIEW, EGM INTERVIEW (HEY, WE LIKE TO TALK), *MGS4* TRAILER, GAMESINDUSTRY.BIZ, MTV.COM, 1UP.COM, NEXT-GEN.BIZ, GAMESINDUSTRY.BIZ

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LOADED AND LOCKED

Think you know your favorite games inside and out? We dig deep for hidden extras that developers never meant for you to see...

G*rand Theft Auto: San Andreas*' hidden "Hot Coffee" humping minigame got us wondering what other not-intended-for-playtime extras are buried deep within our games. A little snooping didn't turn up any more gratuitous sex scenes, unfortunately, but we'll settle for secret levels, developer-testing rooms, and hidden audio tracks. We'll leave the Princess Peach-on-Solid Snake sex minigames to your own fan fiction.

—Jon Dudlak

San Andreas' secret sex scene: certainly not the first instance of left-behind content.

Photo: Getty Images

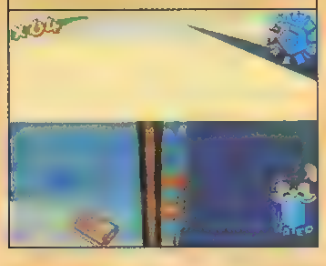
>> ON NOVEMBER 15, SONY WILL RELEASE THE MILITARY SCI-FI FLICK *STEALTH* ON THE PSP'S UMD FORMAT. THE DISC ALSO FEATURES

Super Mario Sunshine's Book in the Bay • GameCube

Deep at the bottom of Noki Bay lies a little something from *Sunshine*'s makers. You can see it but can't reach it.

What'd they leave? It's only a little brown book, but it might as well be a big black box with a question mark on it. Is it an objective that never got implemented? A misplaced prop? No comment from Nintendo....

How do you get it? Dive to the base of the lake in the Noki Bay bottle-diving mission and look for a set of doors on the building and a space in the wall. You can't open the doors, but if you're facing just right, you can turn the camera and see a corner inside the wall with the darn book lying there, just dying to justify its existence.

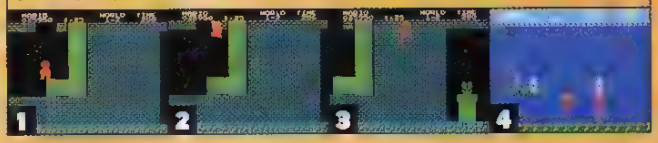


Super Mario Bros.' Minus World • NES

We'd love to have been there when some dude flubbed a brick smash only to get sucked through the wall of a *Super Mario* underworld and fall into the now fabled Mario Minus level. Back in '85 that would have been enough to make us soil our Toughskins.

What'd they leave? One never-ending underwater level with the curious designation "World-1." Swim all you want—it just keeps repeating.

How do you get it? Get to the end of the underground World 1-2 while "big" on 'shrooms. Hop on top of the green pipe and break the second and third bricks to the left. Stand on the edge of the pipe and face left, jump, and hold toward the remaining block of bricks until you slide over the left edge (don't break it, damn you!) and right through the wall. Take the first or third warp pipe. Now take a good look around—you've arrived in the fabled negative land.



Metroid Prime's Secret Worlds • GameCube

OK, they're really more like out-of-bounds regions that weren't sealed off well enough. But ever since the NES *Metroid* became a schoolyard legend with out-of-bounds glitching through bubble doors, the off-limits has been fair game for secret-seekers.

What'd they leave? Holes in the standard boundaries that lead to the game's unpolished outskirts.

How do you get them? Use trees, walls, and debris to skip out anywhere you see a hole in the wall or a barrier that's too low. Go to samus.co.uk/mprime for a comprehensive list of locations.

Final Fantasy VII's Debug Rooms • PS1

Always wanted to play one of the best role-playing games of all time but were too busy (or just too lazy) to see it through? This one's for you.

You'll need a GameShark, but once you load this code you can do anything, go anywhere, see anything in *FFVII*—that is, if you can decipher the kooky menu system in these awesome development-testing areas.

What'd they leave? A collection of character-populated "rooms" that lets you tweak and revisit every little facet of this huge RPG.

How do you get them? Enter the codes 8009A05C 0041 and 8009ABF6 0041 in your GameShark before booting. Once the debug room loads, shut the GameShark codes off and go nuts. If you need some help sorting it out, visit gamefaqs.com for full write-ups on navigating the craziness.

Super Mario Bros. 3's Lost Levels • NES

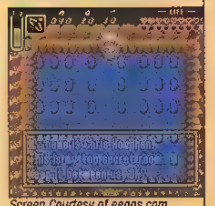
The Lost Levels are some of the best left-behind secrets you'll find anywhere. Short, sweet levels and a couple of unused enemies are reasons enough to pick up a used copy of the game and a Game Genie.

What'd they leave? More than a dozen little levels that were cut from the final game.

How do you get them? An assortment of Game Genie codes unlock different levels. Find 'em in online encyclopedia wikipedia.org. Emulator users have it easier: Visit The Mushroom Kingdom at classicgaming.com and download a free patch that gives you access.

Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past's Chris Houlihan Room • Super NES

Back in the early '90s, Nintendo held a contest that won one lucky geek a cameo in the new *Zelda* game. The winner's name was Chris Houlihan.


Screen Courtesy of eeggs.com

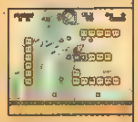
What'd they leave? A room full of rupees and a message from Houlihan about keeping it a secret. See this screenshot? You've experienced it all. Next!

How do you get it? The easiest way involves dashing in the neighborhood of Hyrule Castle with the Pegasus boots. Go to eeggs.com for more detailed instructions.

Super Mario World's Test Stage • Super NES

Wow, Mario's got a lot to hide. This time, inputting a few codes into a Pro Action Replay reveals a piece of the Star Road in *SMW* that leads to a debug level.

What'd they leave? A supershort level with the word "TEST" spelled out in smashable yellow blocks. You can pick up an extra life here, but other than that it's just a curiosity.



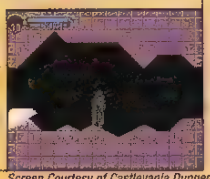
How do you get it? It's a fairly lengthy process of switching Pro Action Replay codes on and off to reach the end of the Star Road in a jiffy. If you've got the gear to try it out, The Mushroom Kingdom at classicgaming.com has a full explanation.

Castlevania: Symphony of the Night's Hidden Ending • PS1

Awesome as it is, classic side-scroller *Symphony of the Night* would have been even better with what sounds like a fifth ending that never got implemented.

What'd they leave? Searching through sound files on the game disc reveals a conversation between Maria, Richter, and others that plays out like an end-battle dialogue. It's the only evidence of such an event on the disc, so it's likely not an attainable ending, but it's pretty sweet if you use your imagination.

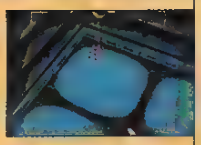
How do you get it? Classicgaming.com's Castlevania Dungeon has a great write-up on the ending (as well as *Symphony* tricks, facts, and test-room info), including an MP3 of the dialogue exchange and a FAQ on using your game disc and a PS1 audio player to extract the sound files.


Screen Courtesy of Castlevania Dungeon

Perfect Dark's Cheese Wedges • Nintendo 64

Ever snipe an enemy in *Perfect Dark* and swear your zoomed-in scope picked up a hint of Swiss over in the corner? Relax—you just found one of developer Rare's hidden treats.

What'd they leave? Rare stashed a single wedge of cheese in almost every level of the main game. The wedges serve no purpose: You can't kill 'em, can't eat 'em—they're just there to find if you're paying close enough attention. "They were from a background [artist] who had finished all of his work but had too much time on his hands," says Rare Designer Chris Tilston.



How do you get them? Scour each levels for a glint of yellow. Some wedges are really well hidden, but if you must find them, planetnintendo.com has each one detailed. Happy hunting.

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AFTERTHOUGHTS: WE ♥ KATAMARI

Talking to the man who's got his eye on the ball

Calling the *Katamari* series "different" would be like calling Paris Hilton "a media whore"—a drastic understatement. But unlike Hilton's new singing career, we welcome the ridiculousness of Namco's ball-rolling franchise. And while many of you are just starting to enjoy the wonderful PS2 sequel *We ♥ Katamari*, we spoke with series creator Keita Takahashi about topics such as his growing popularity, the co-op mode's stumbling blocks, and why he doesn't play videogames (even his own).

Katamari creator Takahashi blames copyright laws for why the sequel's co-op mode didn't work so well in the U.S. version.

EGM: What made you think, "Hey, I'd like to make a game about rolling a ball?" And then, "Hey, I'll make a second game about rolling a ball!"

Keita Takahashi: At that time, there were no projects at Namco that I was interested in. Then my boss said to me, "Why don't you just develop your own game?" For many days I thought about it, and the game I came up with turned out to be one in which the player rolls a katamari around. So there's no particular reason or catalyst for me thinking it up—it's just something that I came up with all of a sudden.

EGM: Do you ever get the urge to roll over stuff in real life?

KT: More than rolling over stuff, I wonder what sort of tragic disaster would occur if there was a massive ball rolling down a hill. [*Laughs*] More than rolling to collect, I think the sense of rolling around is more important....

EGM: Uh...OK, sure. The *Katamari* series seems to have some hardcore fans—have you been recognized on the street? Any marriage proposals? What are some of the ways fans have shown their love for *Katamari*?

KT: [The *Katamari* series] isn't really that popular here in Japan, so up until now I haven't really had anyone recognize me on the street and call out to me. I've not had any marriage proposals yet, either. But I'm always waiting....

EGM: Is your living room a mess?

KT: Actually, my desk is more cluttered than my living room.

EGM: What do you think is the oddest object in *We ♥ Katamari*?

KT: Hmm, what could it be? Maybe the Big Bang?

EGM: Any hidden objects or levels you can tell our readers about?

KT: This time around it's possible for you to get on top of moving objects. Try getting on top of an airplane or a car.

EGM: We weren't crazy about the new co-op mode, in which two players control one ball, and often disagree about where it should be rolling. Is it our fault? Are we bad communicators? Bad people?

KT: In the Japanese version, we implemented a display screen [the display at the bottom center of the screen that shows a hand moving a controller] so that both players could understand each other's control operations. But for the U.S. version, due to copyright infringement, we had to give up the idea of including that display.

EGM: Why weren't the multiplayer challenges longer?

KT: We simply didn't have enough development time.

EGM: Why are the King's pants so tight?

KT: They are easier to move around in.

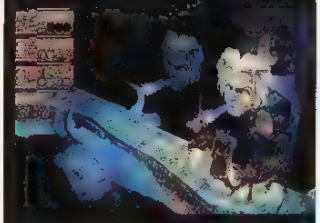
EGM: One last thing: We hear you really don't play games, not even *Katamari*. What's up with that?

KT: In the past, my answer has always been that I don't play games because they don't really seem very interesting or fun. I know it's strange for me to say it myself, but I think the answer is being misinterpreted. Recent games are actually a lot of fun. But I think that this fun and excitement is the same experience from game to game. I want something that is really going to shock and surprise me. There isn't anything like that around right now, so I guess that's why I don't play games.

WHAT'S PLAYING IN THE COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

Despite our bitter, longstanding hatred of all things elvish (yes, this includes Spock and Legolas), we love a good fantasy role-playing game. Or even a good fantasy non-RPG, as the case may be.

Dungeon Siege II



Despite glowing reviews, the original *Dungeon Siege* weathered plenty of criticism due to its highly autonomous gameplay. The sequel endured two years of intensive development and playtesting, ultimately resulting in a more refined game. *DS2* features the same sort of action-RPG trappings that you'd expect from any *Diablo* clone: an involved single-player quest, a variety of fun multiplayer modes, and heaps of items to collect. Sometimes it feels a little too easy, and much of the so-called rare loot is so inconsequential that you'll stop picking stuff up. *DS2* is no *Diablo*, but it's a step forward.

Dark Messiah of Might & Magic

If publisher Ubisoft gets its way, 2006 will be a renaissance for the *Might & Magic* series, thanks to the tag team of *Heroes of Might & Magic V* and *Dark Messiah of Might & Magic*. The latter takes this venerable franchise in a particularly original direction, mixing heroic fantasy with first-person action. Instead of rocket launchers and BFGs, you'll use swords, sorcery, and stealth. *Dark Messiah* also utilizes the *Half-Life 2* graphics engine, which means some breathtaking visual effects and very realistic physics. First-person fantasy: the next big thing?

—*Ryan Scott*
Computer Gaming World

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PS2/XB PREVIEW EXCLUSIVE SCREENS

THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO

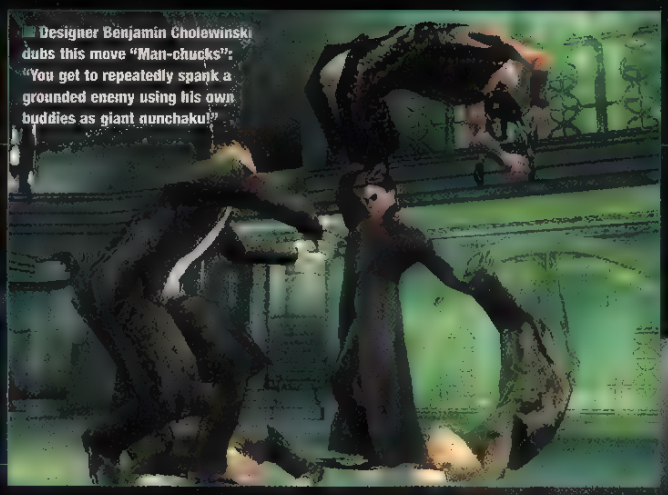
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Shiny
Release Date: November 2005

He knows kung fu

He didn't just punch the security guard. He effortlessly soared 20 feet into the air with the finesse of an eagle, did an inverted acrobatic flip, examined his surroundings (he's still in midair, mind you), landed gracefully on his feet, then proceeded to make Silly Putty out of the guard's face with his stone-hard fists. To the guard, it all happened in the blink of a now-swollen eye. But the way the attacker saw it, he had all the time in the world. It was poetry in slow motion.

We've all seen the elegant ballet of stratospheric kung fu and bullet-trailing firefights whenever good met evil computer programs in the *Matrix* films. Now you can live it in this stylish (and surprisingly hardcore) beat-em-up. Luckily, in *The Matrix: Path of Neo*, you're not playing the punching-bag security guard; you are the guy who's dishing out those high-flying, slow-mo punches. As the game's title implies, you're Mr. Whoa himself: Neo, aka The One. You're eventually tasked with saving all of humankind with your superpowers—but first, you must escape your office workplace without tripping over the mail-room guy.

You play through the most important parts of the *Matrix* movie trilogy, from that scene in which a clueless office worker stealthily avoids capture by the men in black (you can also purposely turn yourself in to these "authorities" for a slightly branched-off story line complete with different cinemas) to whatever it was that happened in the second and third films. Along the way, you learn to fight. At first, you practice basic moves in simulation programs, but you'll soon graduate to a 1-on-1 with bossman/teammate Morpheus and eventually take on multiple Agent Smiths and his thug friends.



Designer Benjamin Cholewinski dubs this move "Man-chucks": "You get to repeatedly spank a grounded enemy using his own buddies as giant nunchaku!"

It's in the hands...and feet

Young grasshoppers don't use guns, so you'll start off with hand-to-hand combat (kick, punch... it's all in the game, but you'll eventually learn how to fight enemies coming from different directions at the same time, use super moves and combos, and factor in Focus (the extra "Matrix power" you use to boost attacks, slow enemies, etc). "We call it 'The Swirly,'" *Path of Neo* designer Benjamin "BJ" Cholewinski says of one of his favorite combos. "You dash around a [illegible] lar, perform a weapon strip on an enemy, then Focus evade over his head, flip-kicking him in the back. You then grab him out of the air, slam him to the ground, then tornado throw him for the win." [illegible] looks awesome in motion.

>> EIDOS ANNOUNCED THAT IT'S DEVELOPING XBOX 360 AND PSP VERSIONS OF *TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND* (ALSO COMING NEXT SPRING TO PS2

Neo takes on the Senior Mutant Ninja Turtles.

Grab a stick

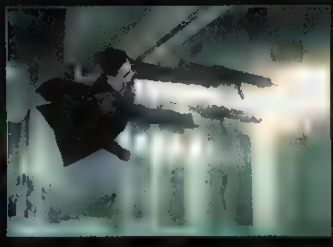
After going a few rounds with Morpheus in the dojo, you may tear open one of the paper walls to reveal racks of swords and staffs in the next room—time to take your fighting game to the next level. You can pick up any melee weapon that you find. What, no two-handed sword lying around? No problem. Just scoop up a push broom or rip out that lamppost and get to work. Of course, this wouldn't be *The Matrix* if you couldn't fancy up the attacks some. "I'm a fan of the melee weapon link-up attacks," says Cholewinski. "Plunging a sword into a Vamp's belly then back-fisting a Doberman and uppercutting a sub-boss brings great satisfaction. The real payoff is in finishing the assault by running up the Vamp's body, pulling the sword out of his chest, then performing aerial slashes as you bounce from Doberman to boss."

Bang...you're dead

Then you have guns. Lots of guns. From dual pistols to submachine guns, from grenade launchers to Gatling guns, you'll have a virtual SWAT arsenal at your disposal (though sometimes, you'll have to "borrow" that arsenal straight from the hands of the SWAT members you're battling). The beautiful slow-mo trails of hot lead ripping through the air really defined the movies' aesthetic style, and that fact is not lost on the developers. You can play the game like it's a typical third-person shooter, but by adding Focus to your gunplay, you help *Path of Neo* steal back some of the snazzy style other shooters, like *Max Payne*, aped from the *Matrix* flicks. "It's hard to top the sensation of smashing the Focus button," says Cholewinski, happily describing yet another picture-perfect scenario to us, "then thrusting into the air, unloading round after round into a horde of SWAT, while swimming in a sea of *Matrix*-style bullet trails." How about doing all that cool stuff in a game that's actually good? Don't worry. From what we've seen and played so far, *Path of Neo* looks to be a far more complete, less-bug-ridden game than 2003's disastrous *Enter the Matrix*, which was made by the same developers. Looks like this new one's the pill we were meant to swallow... ☠

Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Eventually, Neo will gain his godlike powers and be able to fly, stop bullets.... He won't be piloting any vehicles, though.



AND XBOX). PLUS, ANOTHER *TOMB RAIDER* TITLE WILL ARRIVE ON PSP TO COMMEMORATE THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SERIES....

grand theft auto

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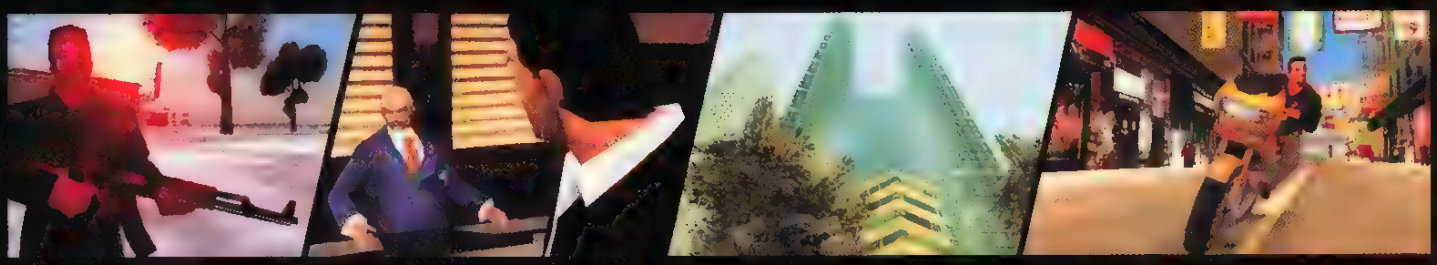
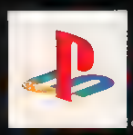
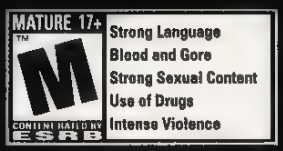






Strong Language
Blood and Gore
Strong Sexual Content
Use of Drugs
Intense Violence

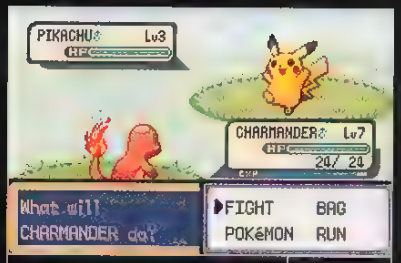
COUNTDOWN TO ISSUE 200:

THE TOP 10 VIDEOGAME

There! On the horizon! Do you see it? The thing that looks like the world's biggest ball of twine? That's *EGM*'s 200th issue, and we're almost there! If we've learned anything over the years, it's that in order to make it in this crazy world, you've gotta have character. In that same spirit, here are our top 10 videogame characters of all time...

10 Lara Croft

The icon of "mature" gaming in the PlayStation era, Lara, in her first *Tomb Raider* adventure, proved you could have a quality platforming experience without having to collect 100 golden whatevers. It also introduced a frightening amount of fan fiction and bad *Photoshop* porn. You go, girl.
Best Game: *Tomb Raider 2* (PS1)
Most Embarrassing Moment: The last 20 or so *Tomb Raider* games.



9 Pikachu

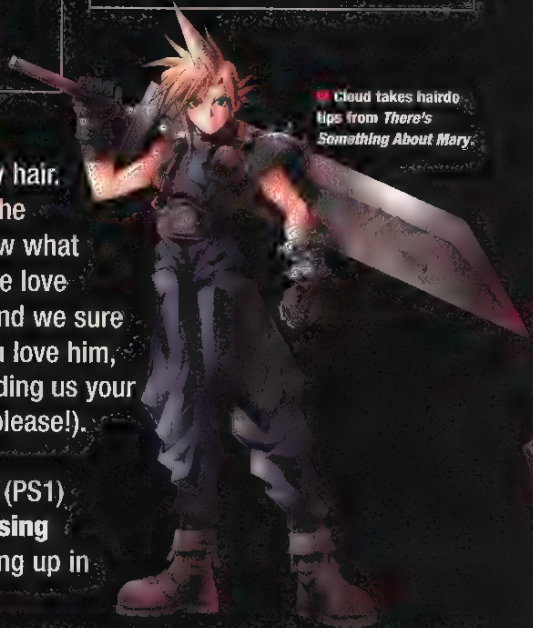
Would *Pokémon* have been such a colossal phenomenon without this sparky li'l guy as its mascot? Well, probably. But it only would have made $790 gajillion instead of $792 gajillion.
Best Game: *Pokémon Gold/Silver* (GBC)
Most Embarrassing Moment: Inducing seizures in Japanese schoolchildren during an episode of the TV show. Naughty!

8 Master Chief

Silent but oh so deadly. In just a few years, Master Chief has become the symbol for the Xbox, and maybe even a new generation of gamers. This kid's gonna be a star!
Best Game: *Halo 2* (XB)
Most Embarrassing Moment: We bet the Chief got a little red under the helmet when he saw a Microsoft exec sporting a tattoo of the *Halo 2* release date.

7 Cloud Strife

Big sword. Spiky hair. Not all there in the head, if you know what we mean. But we love Cloud anyway, and we sure as hell know you love him, too (so stop sending us your cosplayer pics, please!).
Best Game: *Final Fantasy VII* (PS1)
Most Embarrassing Moment: Dressing up in drag in *FFVII*.



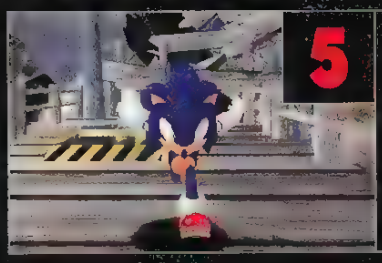
Cloud takes hairdo tips from *There's Something About Mary*.

6 Pac-Man

Yellow ball of life that chomps pellets and hates ghosts? Or symbol of America's gluttony and no-holds-barred competitive mentality in the 1980s? No, yellow ball.
Best Game: *Pac-Man* (Arcade)
Most Embarrassing Moment: The *Mario Party*–esque *Pac-Man Fever* (PS2/GC).

TIGER TELEMATIC'S GIZMONDO HANDHELD HAS BARELY BEEN ON STORE SHELVES LONG ENOUGH TO COLLECT DUST, BUT THE COMPANY

CHARACTERS



5 Sonic the Hedgehog

How fondly we remember the school-yard arguments between the Mario and Sonic camps. Names were called, hair was pulled, and many good friends were lost. Mario fans were perhaps arrogant in their dominance, but the Sonic team made a good case: Fast games are fun.

Best Game: *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* (Genesis)

Most Embarrassing Moment: The voice of Sonic in the cartoon series was done by none other than Jaleel White, who you may know better as the annoying Steve Urkel from TV's *Family Matters*.

4 Samus Aran

Remember when you beat the NES hit *Metroid*, and you thought that this wicked-awesome space bounty hunter dude was the coolest thing you ever saw...and then you realized that you were playing as a girl the whole time? Only Nintendo could emasculate an entire generation of teens and tweens in one fell swoop.

Best Game: *Super Metroid* (SNES)

Most Embarrassing Moment: Could it be the upcoming *Metroid* movie?

Samus sports one helluva mace sprayer.

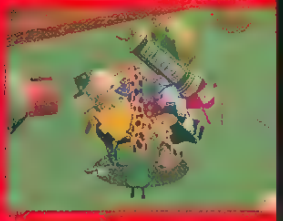
3 Solid Snake

Warrior from birth, Solid Snake is destined to die in combat. Half of the character is undoubtedly developer Hideo Kojima's design, but the growling voice work of actor/screenwriter David Hayter makes the Snake.

Best Game: *Metal Gear Solid* (PS1)

Most Embarrassing Moment: Solid Snake skateboarding his way around Big Shell in the PS2 version of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance*.

UP-AND-COMERS



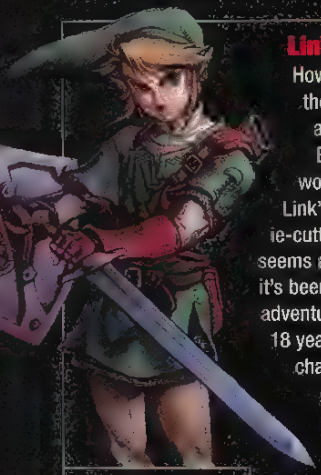
Clock render by Chuck Ernst

THE PRINCE
(*Katamari* series)

JOE
(*Viewtiful Joe* series)

KRATOS
(*God of War*, PS2)

SORA
(*Kingdom Hearts* series)

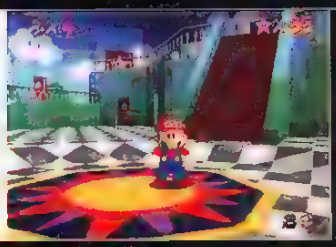


2 Link

How do you get to be the No. 2 best character of all time? By never saying a word. On the surface, Link's somewhat cookie-cutter elfishness seems a little generic. But it's been during his great adventures over the past 18 years that Link's true character has emerged.

Best Game: *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (N64)

Most Embarrassing Moment: Any of those god-awful *Zelda* games for the CD-i.



1 Mario

He had a moustache because there was no other way to show he had a face, and he wore suspenders and a shirt to show that he was actually jumping. It's odd to think that technical limitations inadvertently designed the greatest and most popular game character ever, but here we are, hoping for another 20-plus great years of Mario.

Best Game: *Super Mario 64* (N64)

Most Embarrassing Moment: *Hotel Mario* (CD-i)

HAS ALREADY ANNOUNCED A NEW VERSION THAT'LL BE WIDESCREEN. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS SLICKER MODEL WON'T BE OUT UNTIL '06.... >>

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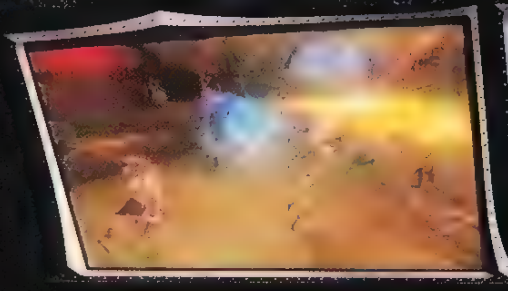
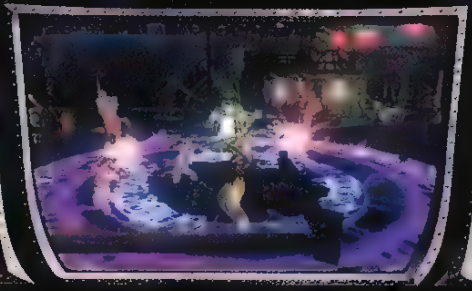


HACK, SLASH AND COMBO-ATTACK YOUR WAY THROUGH FIERCE BATTLES AND SPECTACULAR LEVELS.



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THE RUMOR MILL

Just add water, and in three months it should grow into the truth

Wow—just when I thought Nintendo couldn't deviate from the norm to any greater degree, the company unveils the Revolution controller (check out our hands-on report on page 26). Sure, the device is unconventional, but it also might be just the thing to attract a whole new set of gamers. And boy, am I itchin' to get the early word on the games that'll use the nifty next-gen joypad. Send me your thoughts on the Nintendo Revolution controller at quartermann@ziffdavis.com, and please, I don't want to know all the naughty things you could do with it...sicko! —*The Q*

Back from the dead

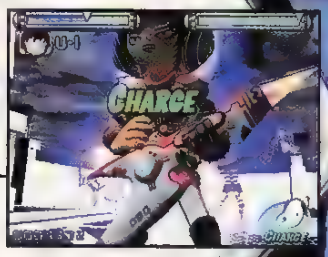
OK, so *Death, Jr.*, the first game ever shown on Sony's PSP handheld, didn't exactly knock 'em...uh, dead. Still, everyone—even the Grim Reaper's son—deserves a second chance: Look for a ***Death, Jr.* sequel next year on both next-gen consoles and PSP**. And this time, let's hope the game doesn't cause motion sickness (eating a McDonald's Double Quarter Pounder value meal + playing *Death, Jr.* = barf).

Strikes a cord

The Q truly cares about pleasing all Rumor Mill readers, including the hardest of the hardcore gamer. If you fall into that category, then this piece of scuttlebutt is especially for you: **A sequel to the peculiar musical-rhythm game *Gitaroo Man* is currently in the works for PS2** and, more important, it's headed Stateside.

Next-gen ride

Project Gotham Racing 3, *Ridge Racer 6*, *Need for Speed: Most Wanted*—racing games are already a dime a dozen on Xbox 360. And don't expect that trend to slow down in 2006, as it appears the ***Midnight Club* franchise will trick out Microsoft's new console** sometime next year. Man, I can't wait to see those screenshots of next-gen rims (that's sarcasm, people).



Soul power

After the multiplatform success of *Soul Calibur II*, The Q was a bit surprised when Namco announced No. 3 as a PlayStation 2 exclusive. Well, it won't be like this forever, as I'm hearing that a special edition of ***Soul Calibur III* is coming to Xbox 360 next spring**. Expect prettier scenery (duh!) and at least one or two exclusive characters. But don't hold your breath for online play.

In good hands

Read our story on the Nintendo Revolution controller and you'll know pretty fast that Hideo Kojima is a *big* fan of the device. So it shouldn't come as a surprise that the man behind the *Metal Gear Solid* series is one of the first third-party developers working on Revolution software. What exactly, I'm not entirely sure, but over the last couple of years, Nintendo has been using outside studios to remake some of its classic franchises. **Imagine if Kojima were working on a Nintendo series** like...well, what do you know? I'm out of time. See you next month!

Now picture *Soul Calibur III* (and Taki's chest) on Xbox 360.

WHAT'S THE DEAL?

Q: Take-Two (which includes Rockstar as one of its publishing brands) recently announced during an earnings report that the company's next fiscal year (ending in February 2007) would see "extensions of the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise." So does that mean we'll get a next-generation *GTA* soon?

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

A: Probably not. Those in the know tell us that the company wants to wait until PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 have respectable installed bases before making another *GTA* for consoles, which would push its release to the latter part of 2007. It's more likely that these "extensions" will be modeled after *GTA: Liberty City Stories*, meaning Rockstar would bring *Vice City* (or maybe one of the metropolises from *San Andreas*) to the PlayStation Portable.

ACTRESS JESSICA ALBA (*FANTASTIC 4*) TOLD MTV.COM THAT SHE'S HELPING DEVELOP AN EXTREME-SPORTS GAME. NO THANKS, JESS....

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SERE
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WHEN IT COMES TO BEING A TEENAGER
AND GETTING HIGH?
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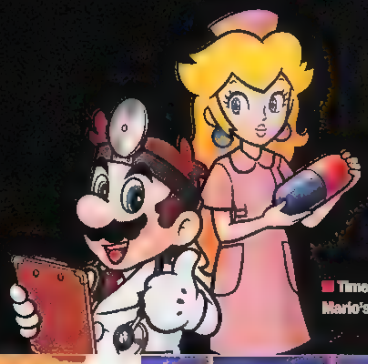
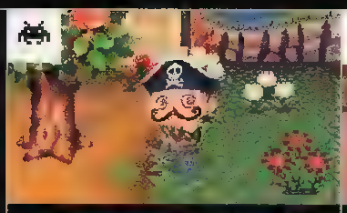
COMING SOON

The perfect last-minute holiday gift...for you



Time for Mario's Cialis!

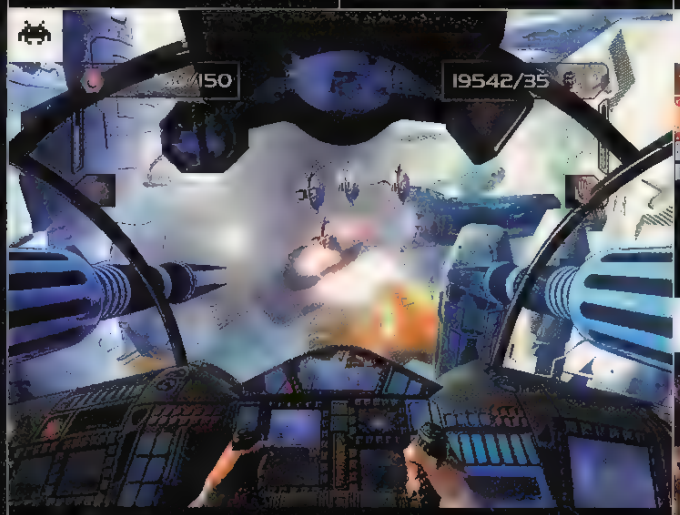
DECEMBER 2005



Animal Crossing: Wild World
Nintendo • DS — Rearranging furniture, choosing drape patterns, and pulling weeds has never been more engaging.

Dragon Booster
Konami • DS — Hmm...something involving dragons and rockets, maybe? Where's a 10-year-old when you need one?

Dr. Mario & Puzzle League
Nintendo • GBA — The greatest puzzle game ever crafted by human hands finally comes to GBA. Oh, and *Dr. Mario*, too.



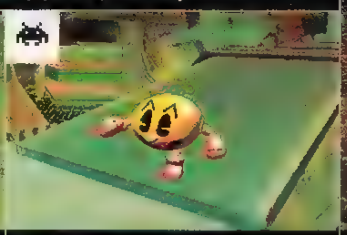
Gene Troopers
Playlogic • PS2/XB — Odds are you haven't heard of this game. Hell, we've barely heard of it. But if you're in the market for an ambitious first-person shooter with an edgy sci-fi story line and RPG elements *from Germany*, your ship has finally arrived.

Dynasty Warriors Advance
Nintendo • GBA — Portable ancient Chinese battle strategy has never been more...um...portable?

Golden Nugget Casino
Majesco • DS/GBA — Gambling made portable, which is great for the 6 a.m. trip to the $1.99 broke-ass breakfast of shame.

Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows
Midway • PS2/XB — *Gauntlet*, that quarter-swallowing succubus from the ancient arcade temples of malls around America, goes online with non-next-gen consoles. Your Nana's coin purse is safe again.

Mario Tennis: Power Tour
Nintendo • GBA — Role-playing and tennis! Two great tastes that taste great together, with a side of mushrooms!



Pac-Man World 3
Namco • PSP — Pac-Man turns 25 and he gets his own world. All we got was a gift certificate to the Vitamin Outlet.

Also in December

Prince DS mixes action and tactics.

FIFA Soccer
EA Sports • XB360

Battles of Prince of Persia
Ubisoft • DS

Super Mario Strikers
Nintendo • GC

Ultimate Brain Games
Telegames • DS

Viewtiful Joe VFX
Capcom • PSP

WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw
THQ • PSP

Viewtiful Joe is even cuter tiny!

>> DOUBLE TROUBLE—*STUBBS THE ZOMBIE*, COMING TO XBOX THIS FALL, WILL ALSO FEATURE AN OFFLINE COOPERATIVE MODE....

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AND GET INTO THINGS YOU'RE NOT REALLY INTO...
MAYBE IT'S TIME TO PUSH BACK.

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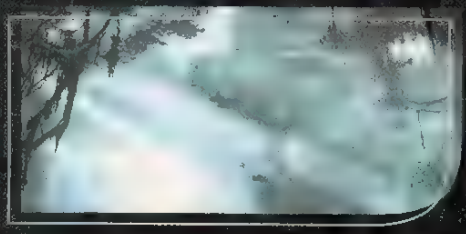

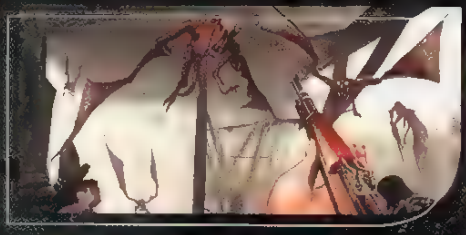

LOOK INTO THE EYES OF THE

THINK YOU KNOW KONG? THINK AGAIN.

BREATHING HEAVILY, YOU CROUCH IN A DENSE THICKET OF JUNGLE VINES. Twenty yards away, a hungry V-Rex rages through the trees, hunting for his dinner. Fear pierces your gut as you realize your trusty weapon is empty. Suddenly, an impossibly huge ape bodyslams the V-Rex, sending it sprawling. And a titanic struggle erupts before your eyes. Welcome to Skull Island – and the unforgettable world of Peter Jackson's King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie

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Some of Skull Island's nastiest predators were created exclusively for the game.

KING KONG FIRST MADE HIS CINEMATIC DEBUT in 1933, thrilling audiences with a powerful story and groundbreaking special effects for its time. Peter Jackson's current reimagining promises to do no less, bringing the perilous world of Skull Island to life as only Jackson can – Jackson and famed game designer Michel Ancel, that is.

> "[Ancel] has just a great storytelling skill in making you so involved in the game as a player that you actually become emotionally attached to the characters that you're playing with."
>
> – Peter Jackson

+ + + + + + + +

AN AVID GAMER, PETER JACKSON STARTED DREAMING UP IDEAS for a King Kong video game as soon as he started the movie. But to make a video game as memorable as the movie, he needed a creative partner with a true talent for rendering both fantasy and emotion. Then he played Beyond Good & Evil™, an epic adventure crafted by renowned game designer Michel Ancel. Right away, Jackson knew he'd found his man. And, judging by the jaw-dropping beauty and intensity of the gameplay, Jackson and Ancel have succeeded brilliantly.

BREATHING LIFE INTO A LEGEND

Jackson and Ancel set out to create a game deeper and more immersive than the film itself. So the game had to look and feel just as convincing as the "real" world captured on film. To achieve this, the development team used every trick in the book – plus a few that aren't.

A rare technique called "inverse kinematics" adds frightening realism to the behavior of Skull Island's predators. This technique varies and synchronizes the animations used for each type of creature, depending on the creature's AI. For example, if you're detected by a V-Rex, you'll see the monster turn its eyes and head directly toward you, lunging over rocks and smashing through the jungle in a convincing attempt to make you its dinner.

But techniques like inverse kinematics would mean little without a sophisticated AI system governing the behavior of Skull Island's denizens. Some species attack alone, while others use clever pursuit tactics to attack in groups. Fortunately, your enemies aren't the only intelligent creatures on Skull Island. Your crew will protect you, suggest solutions to problems, and generally react as real humans – real *scared* humans – would.

And just wait till you feast your eyes on the stunningly detailed jungle of Skull Island. Thanks to clever layering of the largest number of 2D sprites, filters, and effects ever used in any video game – including meteorological effects like water, fog, wind, fire, and smoke – you'll almost be able to feel the hot, humid jungle air. Blades of grass rustle convincingly around your legs. Sunlight patterns shift subtly. In short, this jungle doesn't just look pretty. It feels alive.

Perhaps the greatest creation of all is Kong himself. Agile and powerful, Kong moves through Skull Island with remarkable force and speed. And take a close look at his fur; the dev team used intricate 3D effects to actually animate each separate strand. The overall effect is breathtakingly real.

You'll need your weapons, your team, and quick reflexes to survive on Skull Island.

Where guns fail, brute strength often prevails

A MASSIVE STEP FORWARD: INNOVATIONS IN IMMERSION

Every technical decision has been made with an eye to thoroughly immersing the player in the world of the game. For example, you can still move and look around while scripted plot events occur, unlike nearly all other games. And the absence of a heads-up display makes the action feel more immediate. For example, when your character suffers an injury, you won't see any shrinking "health bar." Instead, your vision will blur and turn red.

The game also offers new experiences that don't appear in the movie. In addition to movie creatures, Jackson added beasts not seen in the film. Multiple pathways offer you a different experience every time you play, so that you'll never have to play the same game twice. The difficulty level scales fluidly according to your performance, growing more challenging as you improve.

Most impressive of all is the range of emotions evoked by the alternating gameplay possibilities. By inviting you to play as both Jack Driscoll and Kong himself, the game delivers an unforgettable mix of intensity, realism, and entertainment through a rare combination of first- and third-person play.

PLAYING WITH POWER: HEROES GREAT AND SMALL

Conceived by Jackson and realized to phenomenal effect by the development team, the dual gameplay between Jack and Kong delivers a dramatic shift in perspective and power.

As Jack Driscoll, you're outnumbered and overpowered by predators bigger, stronger, and faster than you. To heighten the sense of fear and danger, you play Jack's role in first-person. You'll have to advance through a dense jungle, never knowing what lurks behind the next tree. Armed only with the weapons you carry, you'll need other strategies, such as tricking predators into battling each other and using the environment to set clever traps.

At a key moment, you begin playing Kong in third-person. When the camera pulls back to reveal Kong's mighty perspective, you feel a rush of freedom and power. Delivered from the harried perspective of Jack, you inherit swift movements, powerful battle attacks, and the gratifying ability to smash, throw, and scale just about everything around you. But playing as Kong isn't just a walk in the park. Confronted by multiple enemies with clever attack patterns, you'll have to fight hard to defeat huge V-Rexes and outsmart swarms of smaller predators.

The alternating gameplay intensifies the emotions already inherent in the story. Ancel, like Jackson, never loses sight of his audience, throwing you new challenges just when you want them the most. The result is nothing short of an unforgettable game experience. ■

PETER JACKSON'S
KING KONG
THE OFFICIAL GAME OF THE MOVIE

XBOX
XBOX 360
PlayStation.2

TEEN
T
Blood
Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

EGM's annual picks for the top 10 must-get/must-give gaming gifts

Forget any adages you might have heard: Scientists have proven that it really is better to receive than give. So in the interest of science, we once again pick 10 gifts any gamer would want to get. And because any lame gift guide will tell you that shooter fans should request *SOCOM* or fighting gurus must pine for *Soul Calibur III*, we're instead highlighting more unconventional gaming paraphernalia—toys, clothes, books, and gadgets—that should top your wish list this year. If your so-called pals refuse to get you any of this cool stuff, well, we have a few items they might hate to see stuck in their stockings. (Hint: Turn the magazine upside down.)

—*Shawn Smith*

10

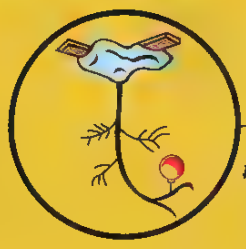
UNKINDEST CUT

Resident Evil 4 Chain Saw

$50 • www.chainsawcontroller.com

If you never open its box, the *Resident Evil* Chainsaw Controller for PS2 is practically a work of art. Beautifully painted with amazing package design, it's something to pass down to the grandkids.

Once opened, you realize how much easier it is to use the good ol' PS2 pad for *Resident Evil* and every other game.



CRAPPY HOLIDAYS!

EGM's annual picks for the top 10 most useless gaming gifts to unload on your enemies

OK, so maybe we can think of a few instances when it is better to give than to receive—like when you need to exact revenge on that one guy who thought it would be funny to buy you *Enter the Matrix* from the discount bin. Ha! Joke's on him, because now you can continue the cycle of violent gift-giving with our picks for presents so silly they're in a class by themselves. Just be sure not to give this stuff to any enemies who might actually enjoy a tie emblazoned with MP3 players or subwoofers that can cause anal injury.

—*Shawn Smith* and *Kyle Orland*

10 THE GIFT OF A THOUSAND GAMES

GameFly certificate
$21.95 for one month • www.gamefly.com

The onslaught of holiday titles makes it difficult to pick just one. Membership to a mail-based game-rental service like GameFly, fortunately, makes sampling game after game as easy as pressing Reset. The standard $21.95-per-month deal lets you try out two titles at a time, and you can keep them as long as you want.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS! (CONT.)

9 RETRO BOOSTER

Atari Flashback 2
$30 • www.atari.com
You can find old-school-game anthologies to play on every system today—but none of them comes with a faux wood-grain finish and two stone-age controllers. The Flashback 2, which jacks right into your TV, has all that and 40 beautifully blocky Atari 2600 titles.

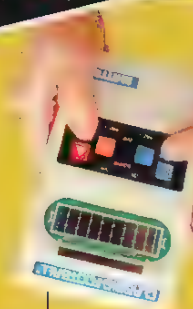
8 STYLE POINTS

Gaming T-shirts
$15–$25 • www.80stees.com, www.penny-arcade.com, www.iam8bit.net
You love games, so why not wear your heart on your sleeve—or, better yet, the front of your shirt? These T's scream comfortable *and* proud geek, and at least one of them even screams your true feelings for a particular videogame-bashing lawyer (see the merchandise section of humor site www.penny-arcade.com).

Photography © R. Dodson/SFMSFITS

7 THE SPRITE IN YOU

PixelBlocks
$30 • www.thinkgeek.com
As entertaining as gaming is, it's not the most creative outlet. So unlock your inner artist and bust out some sweet real-world, old-school sprites. Mega Man, Mario, Sonic, Link—you can build them all with these little Lego-like blocks. Better yet freestyle with your own creation. A unicorn leaping over some rainbows, mayhaps?



9 A PASS FROM THE PAST

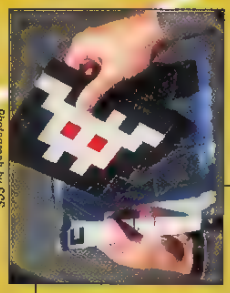
Classic Football
$15 • www.mattel.com
Are you ready for some football...er, LED dots? Sure, the warm, fuzzy nostalgic feelings for this handheld will return when you turn it on and run down the field for 20 yards. But then reality sinks in and you realize that a digital watch has better graphics. Pop out the 9-volt, put it back in your smoke detector, and start up *Madden 06*.

8 TIE DIE

SeV Gadget Tie
$30 • www.scottevest.com
Here's the scenario: Dork enters bar wearing awesome gizmo tie. Jock sees dork, sees dork's tie, becomes enraged. Dork unzips back of gizmo tie to retrieve ID and credit card, almost dropping Pro Duo stick and UMD out of tie. Jock's mind cannot handle level of dorkiness. Jock's head explodes. Dork wins.

7 TROUBLE MAKER

Space Invader Invasion Kit
$80 • www.space-invaders.com/shop
These sturdy limited-edition sticker kits were pioneered by a French artist bent on spreading an underground message of videogames across the globe. He says what you do with your kit is your business, but we think that with a little winking and nudging, you can convince your "friends" to get out there and deface some property. A great way to get enemies out of your hair for three to five months.



Photograph by SCS

AMPED 3
Drop in this winter on the only snowboarding game spinning on the Xbox 360.™
Jeremy Jones
David Benedek
Mikey LeBlanc
Marc Frank Montoya
Torah Bright
Willie Yli-Luoma
Devan Walsh
Travis Parker
On Shelves This Season.
XBOX 360 LIVE
2K SPORTS
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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HAPPY HOLIDAYS! (CONT.)

6

GO FIGURES

Grand Theft Kubrik Figures and Mario Kart RC Cars
$45 and $40 • www.lik-sang.com, rockstargames.com/warehouse
Picture this: Mario is having a leisurely drive around town when bam!—he's taken out with a stiff-arm and some thug jacks his kart. You, too, can create dioramas like this with the Lego-man-like *Grand Theft Auto* Kubrick figures and *Mario Kart* karts. Whether your scenes are Mature-rated or suitable for all gamers is up to you.

5

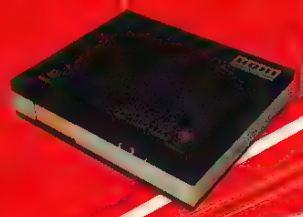
COSTUME PARTY

A Fan's View
$20 • www.fansview.com
If you dress up like *Final Fantasy* characters on the weekend, you'll absolutely love this book. Conversely, if you think the art of cosplay is the lamest, most embarrassing pastime in the history of geekery, you, too, will love this book. In this way, *A Fan's View* is the perfect gift, filled with tons of photos and musings on cosplay from the inside out.

4

ROAD SHOWS

Hori's PSP Pro Duo Video Recorder
$150 • www.lik-sang.com
In theory, watching classic episodes of *The A-Team* or any of your other favorite shows while on the road is awesome, but in practice the convoluted process of converting those shows to your PSP's Memory Stick is a pain in the USB port. Hori's video recorder changes that—simply plug a Memory Stick Pro Duo into the unit, jack in any video source (from DVD players to VCRs to live TV) and record away. The unit transfers the video right to your Memory Stick, which you can plug back into your PSP when you're ready to take the shows on the road.



3

BIG-ASS SOUND

The Buttkicker
$150 • www.thebuttkicker.com
If an average gamer's diet consists of Mountain Dew, pizza, and Doritos, the last thing you'd want near your butt is something that rumbles. Granted, this powerful subwoofer—which clamps to your chair—brings a fair amount of feedback to your gaming environment. But when all things are considered, avoiding anal leakage is a top priority.

2

BLOOD ON THE HIGHWAY

PSP Car Mount
$30 • www.arkon.com
Because cell phones aren't enough of a distraction while driving, why not up the risk factor of your daily commute by dash-mounting Sony's multimedia-powerhouse portable. We're sure watching UMD flicks behind the wheel isn't a head-on collision waiting to happen.

1

NEVER GET LAID

Kasumi "Squishy Pillow"
$55 • www.tecmo.com
Girlfriends? Who needs 'em. Seal your giftee's lifetime virgin status with this squishy Kasumi pillow straight from Tecmo's corporate store. Better yet, at this price, order a few so when one is worn out (read between the lines, people), you have a fresh one on hand. Keep the petrified pillows on your mantel as trophies.

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS! (CONT.)

1 LARGER THAN LIFE

InFocus X3 Projector
$1,200 • www.infocus.com
Who needs a TV when you have that blank wall in your living room, just begging to be blasted with *Burnout: Revenge* 8 feet across it. InFocus' premium projector—our favorite of all the units we tested—supports any video source you can throw at it, as well as ultra-sharp progressive-scan. We won't blame you if you give this ultimate gift to yourself.

2 PLAYING WITH POWER

Generation NEX
$60 • www.playmessiah.com
Nintendo's copyright on the 8-bit NES has run out, making it easy for third-party manufacturers to bust out their own versions. But there's no need to simply pump out the same temperamental system we all grew up with. Instead, manufacturer Messiah has created an updated NES complete with wireless pads, and—more importantly—*without* the glitchy cartridge contacts.

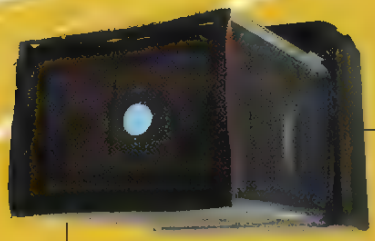
3 ART SNOB

I Am 8-bit Prints
$45–$400 • www.iam8bit.net
Videogame art can be so much more than storyboard sketches and character renders from *Halo 2*. And nothing epitomizes this quite like a suitable-for-framing print from the *I am 8-bit* videogame-inspired art exhibit. Look for a new roundup of artists exhibiting in May 2006 in Los Angeles.

CRAPPY HOLIDAYS! (CONT.)

1 PROJECTOR PROJECT

DIY Projector Kit
$15 • www.extrabargetv.com
ExtraBargetV.com claims it knows "something that the big-screen TV makers don't want you to know"—the secret plans to turn your regular TV into a 100-inch big-screen projector with "no obvious loss of definition." And they'll sell you these plans for just 15 bucks. In reality, the secret involves a big spray-painted box with a magnifying glass on the end of it. After spending $15 on materials and two hours on construction and focusing, the victim of this "gift" will enjoy a narrow, fuzzy, dim image that'll be *upside-down* (the directions recommend an "optional" mirror to correct this).

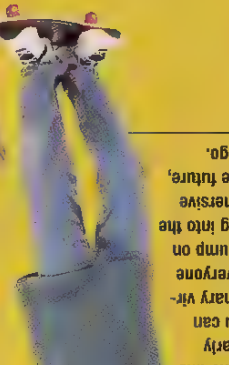


2 FRANKENSTEIN'S HANDHELD

Time Machine NES Games Player for GBA SP
$50 • www.lik-sang.com
Kinda like the Generation NEX on the flipside of this guide, the Time Machine lets you play NES cartridges on a modern system—this time the portable GBA SP. Great, right? Well, unfortunately you also need four AA batteries and a Japanese-to-U.S. cartridge converter to get this to work on American games. Add on the game cartridge and you get a setup that is heavy, unwieldy, and flimsy, while the games themselves look grainy on the tiny screen. Thanks, your friends will say, for nothing.

3 RADICAL!

Virtual-Reality Skateboard
$60 • www.hammacher.com
You saw a lot of setups like this one in movies from the early '90s, and now, finally, you can experience this revolutionary virtual-reality technology everyone has been talking about. Jump on your sweet mindeck, plug into the tube, and experience immersive graphics straight from the future, as envisioned a decade ago.



Get The Big Picture In The Palm Of Your Hand!

"Disney gets our highest marks not only for including a few extras (like deleted scenes on *Tron* or a conversation between Jet Li and Quentin Tarantino for *Hero*), but also for providing its movies in their original aspect ratio rather than cropped to fit the PSP's display."

– *Newsweek*, July 25, 2005

"Disney's innovative videogame-like menus featuring... flying daggers and swords on *Pirates*, and a movable magnifying glass on *National Treasure*, are entertainingly distinct from the DVD version of the same movies."

– *DVD Exclusive Magazine*, May 2005

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Blood
Language
Sexual Themes
Violence

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RING MEN FROM THE JABRONIS

THQ's WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2006 brings all your favorite WWE superstars together for the biggest slobberknocker the PlayStation®2 has ever seen....

New high-resolution textures and motion-capture technology make WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2006 the best and most realistic-looking wrestling game ever. More than 100 match types, including a brand-new Buried Alive brawl, are included and a roster jam-packed with current and classic superstars such as John Cena, Kurt Angle, Batista, Undertaker, Ric Flair, Triple H, Randy Orton, Chris Benoit, Shawn Michaels, Hulk Hogan, and JBL ensure it will also be the most pulse-pounding, beatdown-laden wrestling simulation ever.

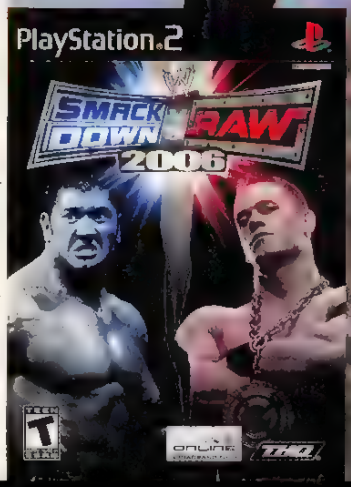
DON'T PREPARE FOR PAIN—INFLICT IT ON THE SUCKERS.

THQ has loaded WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2006 with a host of new features and modes designed to perfectly capture the look and feel of the WWE. An improved fighting system tracking a grappler's momentum and stamina makes matches more strategic and life-like than ever before. Backstage, wrestlers can take the fight to a never-before-seen bar brawl arena and even customize their own 3D locker room.

Go online with WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2006 and dropkick the competition. If you're good enough, you can even compete for an all-new virtual WWE championship. Or take your wrestler through a Season Mode so deep and involving, you'll swear you've stepped into the ring yourself. Potshot your enemies. Clobber your friends backstage. All's fair in the world of the WWE.

The squared circle awaits. Ring the bell. WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2006 arrives in November. Wrestling will never be the same again.

OH, AND IF YOU'RE A PENCIL-NECKED GEEK, STICK TO CHECKERS...



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FANTASY •••••••••• MODERN ERA ••••••••••

EPIC SPECTRUM

2006's PS2 RPGs run the gamut from fantasy to surreality

Back in the day, you wouldn't want someone to overhear you saying "hit points" or "smokin' hot elven princess" in public. But now, our progressive gaming society has embraced role-playing games as mainstream fare, with several RPGs sitting proudly among the decade's best-selling games. At this rate, husky dudes squeezing into Yuna costumes will be perfectly normal by 2015.

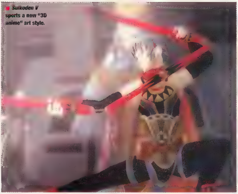
The RPG revolution began on PS1, and the PS2 has proven a fertile spawning ground for a greater variety of role-playing games, with *Final Fantasy* publisher Square Enix leading the charge. *Final Fantasy XII* will undoubtedly be the biggest quest of next year, but not the only one: We've unearthed six promising adventures slated for 2006, and swords 'n' sorcery settings are just the beginning. Roleplaying happens over a wide spectrum of subject matter, ranging from the established norm (orcs, goblins, et al.) to spacefaring sagas set in the distant future. Let's begin the tour....

Key:

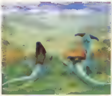
Fantasy
Suikoden V • page 116
Tales of Legendia • page [illegible]

Modern Era
Wild Arms 4 • page 120
Shadow Hearts: FTNW • page [illegible]

Sci-Fi
.hack//G.U. • page [illegible]
Phantasy Star Universe • page [illegible]



Suikoden V sports a new "3D anime" art style.



SUIKODEN V

PS2 • Konami • Fall 2006

After its first two PS2 entries of this classic RPG series failed to revitalize the *Suikoden* name, Konami is hoping that the third PS2 installment will do the trick. As with the last effort, it's a back-to-basics approach.

The previous two titles failed to re-create the charming art style of the PS1 games, but it appears that Konami might have finally figured out how to blend old and new aesthetics to create a timeless look for *Suikoden V*. Slick, anime-style characters, vast medieval cities to explore, and impressive outdoor vistas (that you can traverse from atop a low-tech lizard mount) offer a potent antidote to *Suikoden IV*'s crappy oceanic overworld and crude, difficult-to-navigate towns.

Storywise, little is yet known. Observant fans have pinpointed the setting to slightly before the first game in the series. You play the role of the young prince of Falena...the snag is, Falena can only be ruled by a queen. Sent packing, the brave youth ends up on a journey to recruit all 108 Stars of Destiny—the series' trademark goal.

Six-character battles make a return after the previous game's dalliance with four-man units. Combat appears to be far more dynamic and exciting, with massive bosses and full-party combo attacks filling the screen with wild effects.

Hopefully, this chapter can get the *Suikoden* series back on track, as it has the potential to be one of the genre's best....

Illustration by Nigel Dennis

by Shane Bettenhausen and Christian Nutt

Combat feels more like a brawler than an RPG.

TALES OF LEGENDIA

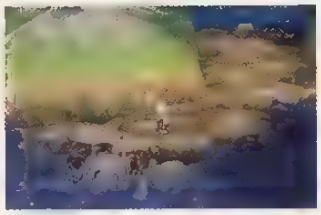
PS2 • Namco • February 2006

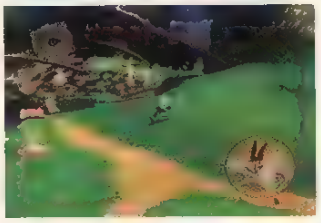
Last year, *Tales of Symphonia* pleasantly surprised GameCube owners with its polished gameplay and charming story. Now, PS2 gamers are poised to enjoy an all-new adventure in this old-school role-playing series. The RPG saga, which hardcore fans may remember playing on the original PlayStation, marries action-packed battles with extremely traditional RPG storytelling and lags behind only *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* in popularity in Japan.

The latest game in the series—created by veterans from other Namco teams, including some who worked on the *Soul Calibur* series—ups the pace with a tight, character-driven narrative about a young warrior encountering bizarre secrets about his homeland that force him to explore the very nature of his world. (Hint: It's not the quaint medieval hamlet it initially appears to be.)

The series' trademark focus on action means that the battles challenge you to perform attacks yourself instead of relying on a menu system. RPG strategy comes in the form of setting up and using your moves and your party of A.I. partners at the right time. The entire enterprise is significantly faster-paced and more interactive than other RPGs, awakening the genre for fans of action games without throwing out all of that good stuff—stat tracking, exploration, and story—that makes the genre so appealing in the first place.

Of course, Namco would love to draw in new players, but playing to its loyal fan base is absolutely crucial. And hardcore RPG nuts will go gaga over the stylin' character art from *Kill Bill* and *Samurai Champloo* artist Kazuto Nakazawa. ➤





Nothing like a good old-fashioned overworld.

JAK COMES IN SECOND. HE DIES.
THIRD. HE DIES.
FOURTH. HE DIES.
FIFTH. YOU GET THE IDEA.
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Crude Humor
Fantasy Violence
Language
Use of Tobacco
ONLINE
BROADBAND ONLY
NAUGHTY DOG
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JAK X
COMBAT RACING™
This time, Jak's racing for his life.
PlayStation 2
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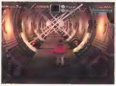
PLAY IN OURS

FANTASY •••••••••• MODERN ERA •••••••••• SCI-FI



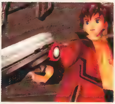
WILD ARMS 4

PS2 • Xseed • January 2006

As the *Wild Arms* series quietly creeps toward its 10-year anniversary, it continues to evolve far beyond its initial birth as a *Final Fantasy VII* clone. "I find direct sequels to be kind of boring," says Director Nobuo Nakazawa. "We try to make each new game fresh to attract new players, and also [try] to do away with the feeling that the older games are prerequisites for the current one." The previous PS2 installment, 2002's *Wild Arms 3*, experimented with cartoony visuals and a more flamboyant cowboy aesthetic, both of which are now gone. "We've definitely toned down the Wild West style," says Nakazawa. "In fact, you might even say the new game has a more modern feeling."

Along with the 10-gallon hats and buckin' broncos, the developers also bulldozed the game's battle system and exploration gameplay. Now, battles unfold on a unique hex battlefield—it's turn-based, tactical combat where the position of units becomes crucial, as every attack can damage everyone within a given hex. When you're not bustin' up fools in battle, you'll be hopping and bopping through the game's new action sequences. "We really wanted to include action elements in the game," admits Nakazawa. "We didn't want to make the platforming sections too hard for RPG players to handle, though."

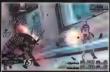
You'll be running, jumping, and slicing in the dungeons.



GO EVEN DEEPER ON THE PS2 IN 2006

Kingdom Hearts II
PS2 • Square Enix • Spring 2006
You'll have to wait a few more months for this *Final Fantasy* meets Mickey Mouse mash-up sequel.

Rogue Galaxy
PS2 • Sony CEA • Summer 2006
The developer behind the *Dark Cloud* games forges an ambitious new world in this *Final Fantasy*–style quest.



Xenosaga Episode III
PS2 • Namco • Fall 2006
Namco decides to wrap up the planned six-part space opera series in this third and final installment.

Code Age Commanders
PS2 • Square Enix • Summer 2006
Prepare for a triple assault, with this *.hack*-ish action-RPG, an anime series, and a tie-in comic book.

Be Wallace. Be Gromit. Beware.
It's a new game based on a cracking good movie.
There's a monster loose. And only you can save the town's vegetables. Play as Wallace, Gromit or Hutch, in one or two-player mode as you explore every inch of their hometown, with your trusty bun-gun in hand. So get ready, the garden needs guardin'.
Wallace & Gromit in
THE CURSE OF THE WERE-RABBIT
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Mild Cartoon Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
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Aardman
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KONAMI
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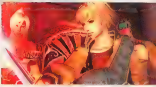
RPG (CONT.)

FANTASY••••••MODERN ERA••••••SCI-FI

Your American history books totally glossed over this stuff.



■ Yep, this is exactly how your grandma dressed in 1929.

SHADOW HEARTS: FROM THE NEW WORLD

PS2 • Xseed • March 2006

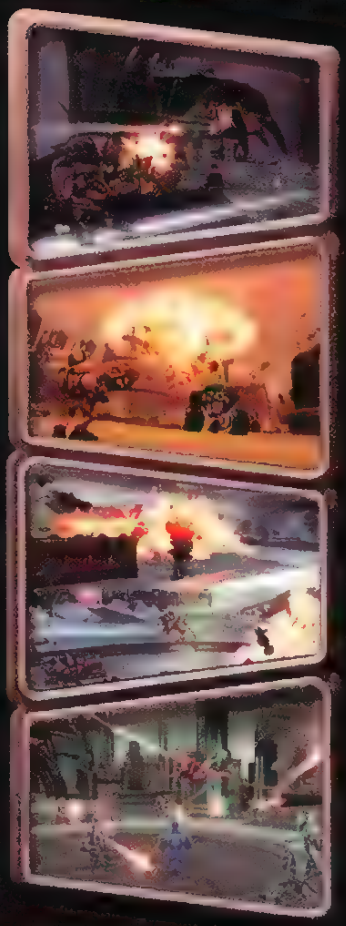
In a lot of ways, the *Shadow Hearts* games closely resemble recent *Final Fantasy* titles: You've got your ragtag band of heroes, turn-based battles, convoluted magic system, and over-the-top CG cut-scenes. The two series diverge, however, when it comes to subject matter. While *FF* sticks with an otherworldly fantasy vibe, *Shadow Hearts* tackles 20th century Earth history. Real-life figures such as Rasputin, Roger Bacon, and princess Anastasia play key roles in the series' narrative, making this the only RPG around that could possibly help with your homework.

From the New World shifts the series' setting to the U.S.A. for the first time, thrusting players into a weirded-out version of 1929 America that plays host to gangsters, native Americans, diabolical warlocks, and president FDR, who is a playable character. "We've always wanted to incorporate America into a *Shadow Hearts* game," explains Director Hiroki Kikuta. "It's not necessarily an accurate version of the real place, though: You'll visit places like Las Vegas and Roswell that didn't really exist in this way back in the day." The shift of locale brings a fresh new flavor to the series, but returning fans should ease right back in. "Despite the new characters and locations, we still maintain the traditions of gameplay, design, and bawdy humor that fans expect," says Kikuta. (Yep, that means *SH2*'s flamboyantly gay shopkeepers are back.) ➤

IN THIS GALACTIC BATTLE ARENA, ONLY THE WELL-ARMORED, KILLER-BOT-ACCOMPANIED, WEAPON-WIELDING WILL SURVIVE.

RATCHET DEADLOCKED

Captured by a deranged media mogul, you're now forced to compete for your life in the scarred arena of an underground game show. The good news? You're not alone. You've got badass robot friends to help blast you through anything. Because it's not just how you fire your weapons, it's how you fire your commands.



Fantasy Violence
Mild Language

PlayStation 2

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ULTIMATE GOAL

Shape the face of the new world.

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB Blood Violence

Microsoft game studios

ENSEMBLE STUDIOS

IMMEDIATE GOAL
Make it through the next ten minutes.
AGE of EMPIRES III
Deploy armies. Command armadas. Inspire a nation. With your brilliant strategic planning and shrewd combat tactics, a new world full of promise is yours for the taking. A new empire is yours to build. But will you survive long enough to enjoy it?

RPG (CONT.)

FANTASY • MODERN ERA • SCI-FI

G.U.'s characters sport a new, darker anime look.

.HACK//G.U.

PS2 • Bandai • Summer 2006

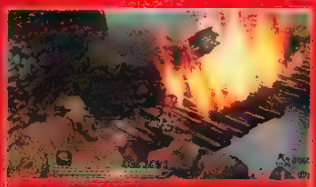
Just when you thought your PS2 was scrubbed clean of malignant viruses, this Net-themed RPG plunges it back into the fray with three new installments, undercutting the original's set of four by one volume.

Last time, gamers complained that the four chapters were too similar, even if the story rocked. This time, the developers are on the ball. Developer Hiroshi Matsuyama understands our concerns. "The first time, everything was more focused on the story line," he says. "This time, we're still concentrating on that, as well as the game system [and] gameplay.... There are going to be different gameplay mechanics and things that you can do that are not in part one but will be in part two." New play mechanics will be added in each volume to keep players coming back for a second and third helpings.

The games, though, will retain the unusual premise of being a faux online adventure. Each *.hack* title mimics a massively multiplayer online game, but your PS2 generates the other characters, their dialogue penned by writers. The whole world is a simulation of a simulation. (An actual online version of *.hack*'s virtual world is also in production.) The series' signature fast-paced dungeon crawling and speedy, action-filled battles return here, but expect a refined take on both as the team concentrates on ironing out the previous games' bugs.

SPEND SOME QUALITY TIME WITH YOUR PSP IN 2006

Kingdom of Paradise
PSP • Sony CEA • November 2005
This original action-RPG dishes up hearty servings of combo-based combat, making it feel a tad like *Dynasty Warriors*.



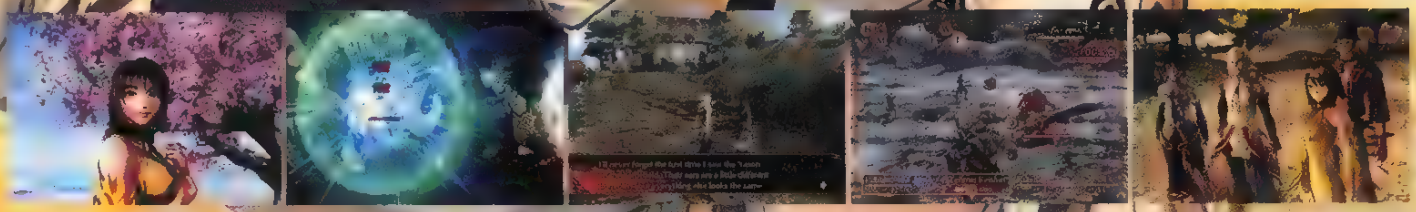
Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim
PSP • Konami • Spring 2006
Porting this quaint adventure over from the PS2 has taken a bit longer than expected, but at least it'll include some new minigames.

Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code
PSP • Sony Online • Spring 2006
With the first *Legends* still burning up the PSP sales charts, this gussied-up sequel should find many fans.

Monster Hunter Portable
PSP • Capcom • Spring 2006
Stunning visuals make this downsized PS2 port stand out from its peers. A lack of true Wi-Fi online play (it's local only) really stings, though.

An Epic Tale of War, Romance and Betrayal...

"...an RPG, with the kind of innovative systems and gameplay, story and characters that can incite a movement."
- PLAY Magazine



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Dual-sided coversheet!

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TEARS OF BLOOD

TEEN
T
Fantasy Violence
Language
Suggestive Themes
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PlayStation.2

RPG

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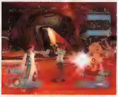
FANTASY •••••• MODERN ERA •••••• SCI-FI

Eight hours later, you realize that you forgot to eat today.



PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

PS2 • Sega • February 2006

The hottest place to meet your friends in 2006 will likely be a gleaming space station hovering above the Ragol star system. As the true sequel to Sega's pioneering online RPG *Phantasy Star Online, Universe* threatens to monopolize a terrifying amount of your free time. Seriously, even casual players can expect to drop at least 100 hours on the multiplayer action: Although it's not a *Final Fantasy XI*–style massively multiplayer affair, you'll still keep coming back to explore its gorgeous futuristic dungeons, smite killer bosses, and amass a never-ending array of cool items.

Sega's been avoiding full disclosure regarding details of the online mode, but we now know that you'll have six players in your party and that you'll be able to change your abilities and weapon preferences as you play, which should mark a big improvement over *PSO*'s limited class system. You'll also be able to craft your own weapons, armor, and items and sell them to other players.

Sega has no qualms when it comes to chatting about *PSU*'s single-player adventure, however. "*PSO* didn't concentrate on its offline game," explains Director Takao Miyoshi. "*PSU* has at least four times the content, with a huge 40-hour quest, hours of spoken dialogue, and an epic story." And since a shocking number of *PSO* owners never even dabbled in the online action, at least those guys will have a meaty, worth-while story mode to tackle this time.

IF YOU THINK
THE DICE LOOK WEIRD,
IMAGINE WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH THEM.

Wizards

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

EVERYONE 10+

Mild Lyrics
Suggestive Themes

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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review crew

we'll say it again: too many games

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THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS...

Yeah, it's kind of tough to float the pity card because we've got, you know, *too many games to play*...but what a month. If you get even a fraction of the games we reviewed this issue—and you better, considering four of them earned Gold awards—you'll know where we're coming from.

You math majors out there might notice a little discrepancy with our Game of the Month—*Resident Evil 4* for PS2 actually scored higher than our winner, *GTA: Liberty City Stories*. But wait! *RE4* is disqualified, as the GameCube version took GOTM honors back in *EGM* #189. Ha-ha! Nice try, braniacs, better luck next time.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: LIBERTY CITY STORIES

GAME OF THE MONTH

THE REVIEW CREW

DAN "SHOE" HSU • Editor-in-Chief
Eighty-five-hour work weeks? It's that time of year. Good thing there's a Peet's Coffee downstairs.
Now Playing: *GTA: Liberty City Stories, Soul Calibur III*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com

MARK MACDONALD • Executive Editor
Mark likes the Revolution controller—even if it looks like a "personal massager."
Now Playing: *SOCOM 3, Shadow of the Colossus*
Blog: egmmark.1UP.com

JENNIFER TSAO • Managing Editor
Here's Jen right after she got the heart-shaped bed in *The Sims 2*. Innocent Sims everywhere, look out!
Now Playing: *Indigo Prophecy, SSX on Tour*
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com

CRISPIN BOYER • Senior Editor
Crispin likes games about shooting *and* about talking out your differences.
Now Playing: *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat, SOCOM 3*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com

SHANE BETTENHAUSEN • Previews Editor
Having solved most of this fall's games, Shane revisits obscure "classics" like *Toilet Kids* (PC Engine).
Now Playing: *Castlevania: COD, Soul Calibur III, Pong*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com

DEMIAN LINN • Reviews Editor
Has *Guitar Hero* at home, wants to play it, but can't wrest it from his girlfriend's manicured death grip.
Now Playing: *Soul Calibur III, Guitar Hero* (in theory)
Blog: egmdemian.1UP.com

BRYAN INTIHAR • News Editor
Believe it or not, Bryan's the baby of the *EGM* staff. Hence, he reviews *Pokémon XD*.
Now Playing: *Ratchet: Deadlocked, Blitz*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com

ROBERT ASHLEY • Staff Reviewer
Took breaks from *Red Hot Rumble* to cook from the *Zuni Cafe Cookbook*.
Now Playing: *Karaoke Revolution Party* minigames
Blog: robertashley.1UP.com

JOSH CAIN • Staff Reviewer
After a brief hiatus and trip abroad, Josh is back and hungry for more.
Now Playing: *NBA Street Vol. 3*, without a full deck
Blog: egmjosh.1UP.com

ROBERT COFFEY • Staff Reviewer
Discovered a way to shower more efficiently, recouping two minutes from the tyranny of hygiene.
Now Playing: *Indigo Prophecy*
Blog: citizen_pain.1UP.com

GREG FORD • Staff Reviewer
As the mountain of holiday releases approaches, Ford takes on all comers, baby games and brawlers alike.
Now Playing: *GTA: Liberty City Stories, The Warriors*
Blog: egm_ford.1UP.com

JENN FRANK • Staff Reviewer
The new kid on the block, Jenn's still trying to figure out who to sit by at lunch.
Now Playing: *Burnout Revenge, Psychonauts*
Blog: superjenn.1UP.com

JAMES LEE • Staff Reviewer
After having all this WWII fun, James wonders why there are no games set in the Korean War.
Now Playing: Hot coffee mod by himself
Blog: egmwiley.1UP.com

CHRISTIAN NUTT • Staff Reviewer
Christian's favorite track in *We ♥ Katamari* is "Kuru Kuru Rock."
Now Playing: *Fire Emblem: POR, Ys: The Oath in Felghana*
Blog: ferricide.1UP.com

KATHLEEN SANDERS • Staff Reviewer
Currently attending 'Seanbaby's S****y Game Survival School.' She's at the top of her class!
Now Playing: *Burnout Revenge, Advance Wars: DS*
Blog: cooklecups.1UP.com

GREG SEWART • Staff Reviewer
Greggie delights in crushing his enemies and hearing the lamentations of their women.
Now Playing: *Burnout Revenge, Resident Evil 4*
Blog: stewy.1UP.com

JUSTIN SPEER • Staff Reviewer
Justin recently lost his second PlayStation 2 in the line of duty. Rest in peace, Crunchy.
Now Playing: *Culdcept, We ♥ Katamari*
Blog: zepyulos.1UP.com

■ The arrival of anyone from the **OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE, POCKET GAMES,** or **1UP.COM** is always preceded by the faint odor of damp Lycra and pinecones—it's part of their charm. Sometimes they also give us their opinions on videogames.

10-7 GOOD

6.5-5 FAIR

4.5-0 BAD

Platinum — straight 10s. For games that are life-changing.

Gold — for games with an average score of 9.0 or higher.

Silver — for games with a mean score of 8.0 or higher.

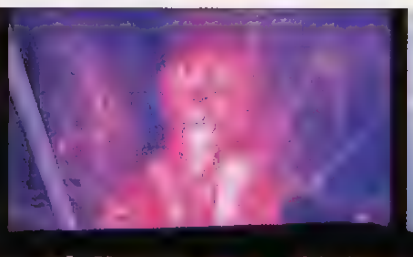
GAME OF THE MONTH — The highest-scoring game each month gets a star.

SHAME OF THE MONTH — The lowest-rated game with unanimously bad scores.

ESRB Ratings
The ESRB's game ratings range from "Everyone" to "Adults Only." Visit **www.esrb.org** for the full lowdown.

4 MILLION PEOPLE
HAVE BECOME OBSESSED.

ON NOVEMBER 22, FIND OUT WHY.



FINAL FANTASY XII

INCLUDES AN EXCLUSIVE
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DRAGON QUEST™ VIII

Journey of the Cursed King

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PlayStation 2

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Stormtroopers may be scared shitless in the flicks, but they're badass in the game. Gust this particular one standing on a grenade.

PS2/XB

ONLINE (PS2/XB)

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

This review is a 100% Star Wars quote-free zone

SHOE: The droids aren't too thrilled. I just turned a dozen of them into tin confetti with my blasters, thermal detonators, and occasional lightsaber swing, and now they're looking to make roadkill out of me and my teammates with their Hailfire tank.

Later, we're swooping down on a gigantic Star Destroyer with our X- and Y-wings, dodging streams of laser fire. I'm looking to dock, so I can get out and blow up their auto-defense mainframe from the inside. If I can live through this suicide mission, I might just hijack a TIE fighter to fly back out to the fray in space, just as a middle-finger farewell to the Empire.

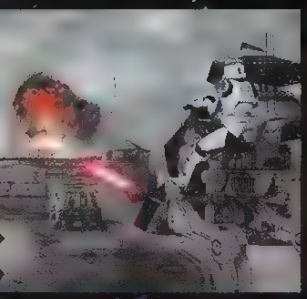
Oh yeah, this is the ultimate in *Star Wars* nerddom. Big armies from all eras face off like you're playing out epic fantasy battles—on land or now in space—with every *Wars* toy you could ever buy. And unfortunately, that's more true than it should be. As with the last *Battlefront*, I still feel like I'm controlling cheap plastic toys rather than real soldiers, tanks, or spaceships. Everything looks and feels so insubstantial, with no tangible weight or physics. I guess they all can't be *Halo 2*....

But get past *BF2*'s lightweight status and you'll still find an exciting shooter underneath. And even though the game was designed for big multiplayer parties, I enjoyed it plenty offline. The developers really put some energy into making sure the new story-driven and objective-based rise of the Empire mode and the more strategic galactic conquest mode provided solid, deeper experiences for single-player or splitscreen. But online or off, you can't go wrong with a virtual *Star Wars* toy box this huge and ambitious.

DEMIAN: The last *Battlefront* was missing two big things: a cantina-scene rhythm-action minigame and anatomically correct Twi'leks. No wait, I mean playable Jedi and space combat. And while it is kind of fun to run around and kill everyone (friend or foe, outta my way!) with a lightsaber, the space battles are a bigger deal to me. Though the on-foot stuff is still fun and new units—like Bothan spies, which can stealth—add more variety. Shoe's right, it just doesn't feel quite as solid in the shooter department as *Halo* or *SOCOM*.

1UP.COM—ANDREW: *Battlefront II* seems like what the first *Battlefront* should have been to begin with. There's so much that's familiar and repurposed (like oh, say, THE BATTLE OF HOTH) that your copy of the first game has been rendered irrelevant. I do like that they've balanced the more overpowered vehicles in the ground missions so that it's not just a race to the X-wing or AT-ST, and the capital ship space battles remind me fondly of PC classic *X-Wing Alliance* (though they could have used a bit more variety in the battle setups and strategies). The best thing about *Battlefront* is how it's not overly complex: If you can see it, you can shoot it, capture it, or pilot it. Hooray for accessibility.

Dibs on Boba
You can activate a Jedi hero or villain to play in the middle of a mission. Sure, they can mow down dozens of enemies with Force powers and lightsabers but they do have a limited amount of health. *BF2* also introduces a few new basic units, like the chain-gun wielding clone commander or rebel Bothan spy, who can cloak.



A New Hope

Playable Jedi, new modes (like capture the flag and hunt—a more "for fun" set of scenarios like Ewoks vs. Scout Troopers, Tusken Raiders vs. Jawas, etc.), space battles, new units, the ability to sprint, new *Episode III* content...these are the biggest improvements to *Battlefront II*. Our fave: a secret mode where everyone's a Jedi or hero character. It's unbalanced as heck (unfair: Force push), but it's another "for fun" dealie that provides a great change of pace. It's simply surreal seeing Darth Maul Force pushing Yoda into some Tatooine back alley, then whaling on him with a lightsaber while the cantina band lays down smooth-jazz grooves around the corner....

Someone picked Grievous over Vader? Unwise.

Good: Fun offline modes
Bad: Still feels cheap and flimsy
Fan Service: These guys are in the game www.501st.com

THE VERDICTS (out of 10)

SHOE	DEMIAN	ANDREW
8.5	7.5	8.5

Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Pandemic
Players: PS2 1-2 (2-24 online or system link), XB 1-4 (2-32 online or via system link)
ESRB: Teen
www.starwarsbattlefront.com

Don't be fooled by the mohawk—he dances like Usher.

DDR experts won't necessarily have a leg up—the arrows scroll horizontally.

PlayStation 2

KARAOKE REVOLUTION PARTY

How to win friends and make your neighbors hate you

Good: Song selection, bizarre vocal minigames
Bad: The screeching caterwaul of two-player voice *Pong*
Recipe for Humiliation: Coordinating pitch, lyrics, and steps

ROBERT A: It says "party" right there on the box, so I had to have one. Saturday night I filled my apartment with drunken karaoke singers. For the uninitiated, the big difference between karaoke and *Karaoke Revolution* is that the game measures the pitch of your voice, scoring your performance and nudging you into proper pitch with a guide arrow.

11:15 p.m.: A few nervous, sober, solo performances segue into nicely buzzed duets. 11:45 p.m.: An awe-inspiring male-female duet performance of "You Make Me Feel (Like a Natural Woman)" hits the chorus harmonies perfectly. 12:30 a.m.: Soul-singing sensation Mike says, "They reward you for singing like a robot." It's true. 12:50 a.m.: We stumble onto the vocal minigames. "Yo! Dude! Rock!" 1:00 a.m.: Attempts at playing Beach Volleyball (basically *Pong* using vocal pitch to control the paddles) are thwarted by contagious laughter. My apartment sounds like a Yoko Ono concert, people howling random pitches to return the volleys. It's awesome. 1:40 a.m.: We break out the dance mat for a go at Sing & Dance mode. Cool idea, but none of us is coordinated and we narrowly avoid injury before ending the night.

JENNIFER: This is the moment we've been waiting for, when we can sing, dance, and wear microphone headsets like Britney Spears in her heyday—superstars in our living rooms, platinum albums and sold-out arenas from the privacy of our own homes. The sing-and-dance mode may overwhelm those who barely made it through just the singing of previous versions. You'd really better know the lyrics or be damn quick on your feet, because this game (finally!) delivers a real challenge, even to the musically inclined. The sing-and-dance song list may be small, but the outstanding variety and quantity of songs in the other modes compensate. Cancel the carolers—this is the only entertainment you'll need at your holiday party.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE: If you've made any previous *KR* the centerpiece of a party, you're going to absolutely love this one. It's full of fun multiplayer features scientifically designed to get even the most adamant wallflower out into the middle of the living room. The flip side is that the single-player experience feels much less rewarding. The career progression of the previous games has been ditched in favor of a play-to-unlock model, which would be fine if the rewards were more than mostly outfits and characters, with only a few songs thrown in. The fairly tepid song list doesn't help things either; a few tunes stand out, but many more feel like filler.

Harmonix wisely didn't include a sing-and-dance option in duet mode—we suspect that'd cause some sort of nuclear reaction.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)		
8.5	9.0	7.0
ROBERT A.	JENNIFER	JOE

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Harmonix
Players: 1-8
ESRB: Everyone

www.konami.com

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Would a "let the Wookiee win" reference work here? No?

PS2/XB/GC

THE SIMS 2

Back to the grind

Good: Still an awesome virtual dollhouse
Bad: Behind-the-scenes loading makes gameplay jerky
Patience is a Virtue: And you'll need tons

JENNIFER: When do we get *The Sims: Sabbatical*? I mean, I'm a huge fan of this real-life sim, and *The Sims 2* refreshes the formula by borrowing its PC sibling's wants-and-fears gameplay, wherein you progress by satisfying your Sims' desires while avoiding their deep, dark fears.

While an improvement over last year's *Urbz*, *The Sims*' underlying architecture is getting stale. I'm sick of my gal not being able to cook and talk on the phone at the same time. I'm tired of how Sims need almost as long to take a pee as to meet someone and propose marriage. And whenever your Sim interacts with something, first they have to do an irritatingly slow (and funny-lookin') shuffle to get in position. I still experienced that thrill when Betty Bloo got her promotions or earned enough to buy the fancy fridge filled with organic veggies she could use in love potions or projectile-vomit-inducing stews (definitely give the new recipe system a chance; once you get the good ingredients, it's really fun to see what you can concoct). But the new bells and whistles aren't crucial; I'd still recommend *Get a Life* or *Bustin' Out*.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—DANA: This franchise got me addicted to gaming, so I have a soft spot for it, but this version feels more like *The Sims 1.5* than *The Sims 2*. It's not that there's anything wrong, just that, well, I've done most of this stuff before. A number of times. The new clothing design part is kind of cool, and I had fun playing with cooking (particularly when I stumbled upon a combination that helped me max out all of my skill points), but in the end, having to baby-sit adults gets tiresome. I'm ready for this series to advance its gameplay, rather than just continuing to add new objects and locations to interact with.

1UP.COM—KAREN: *The Sims 2*'s core gameplay remains the same as in the PC version, but navigation is drastically different; controlling your Sims' movement and the camera with the thumbstick actually feels natural. It's extremely liberating to be able to kick back, watch your Sims release that bladder tension on the big screen, and free your body from that PC-keyboard-mouse configuration. I was irked at first about how these Sims stay the same age instead of getting older the way their PC counterparts do. But the large collection of unlockable areas and minigames like cooking and socializing compensate well for that particular lack of depth. This game definitely breaks the PC-translation curse and has its own quirky charm and adventure-game flair.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JENNIFER	DANA	KAREN
	7.5	6.5	7.0

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: Maxis
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

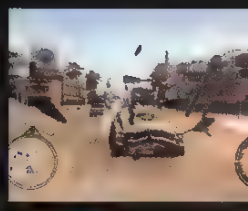
thesims2.ea.com

PS2/XB

L.A. RUSH

Because L.A. traffic is *so fast*

What this car lacks in speed it makes up for in pimp.



Good: Fantastic collection of licensed cars, variety of events
Bad: Inconsistent collisions, no online play
Resist Arrest: Let the cops wreck your car to avoid arrest

GREG S: *L.A. Rush* attempts to emulate the best bits of *Need for Speed Underground* and *Hot Pursuit*, *Midnight Club*, and *Burnout*—the end result is a slightly sloppy, decent street racer that doesn't really come close to matching any of the aforementioned titles.

But *L.A. Rush* does a lot right. The variety of race modes and large collection of licensed cars (a good mix of rice rockets and classic low riders) are two high points. The thing that frustrates the heck out of me, though, is the game's inconsistency. As I streak down the burning pavement of Los Angeles, the weirdest things happen. I hit a tree head-on and simply slide off without losing speed. I drop one wheel into the shallow water along the beach and come to a complete stop. I careen off oncoming traffic and suffer nothing but a bit of superficial damage. I hit traffic headed the same direction as me and suffer a bone-jarring crash. That kind of weirdness can bring on some serious road rage.

G. FORD: It's been a while since I've played a game as frustrating as *L.A. Rush*. The myriad times I lost a tight race due to big rigs cutting me off, cops targeting only me (as other street racers whiz by), or perfectly placed inopportune oncoming traffic blindsiding me proved demoralizing—I didn't realize games still relied on so many cheap tricks. And it's too bad, because *L.A. Rush* is so close to being a very good game. The city is impressive; the controls, though a little loose, get the job done; and the mission variety is sweet. But between the high frustration factor and the frequent need to crisscross the large city (some kind of warp option would be nice), I feel *Rush* tries a little too hard to turn me off.

JAMES: Midway reinvented the arcade *Rush* classics with a free-roaming environment, giving us a whole new racing experience...if it were 2002. The oxymoronically titled *L.A. Rush* delivers some real enjoyment when you weave through heavy traffic, but rear-end someone and the resulting ridiculously explosive slow-motion car crashes seem to last forever, as if *Rush* was trying to preach to reckless drivers (or make Michael Bay jealous). The other "new" features, such as officially pimping out your ride through West Coast Customs, are all nice, but much like being able to sing karaoke from the trunk of your car or having a chandelier in your SUV, you wonder if all that extra effort would've been better placed in, say, the actual driving experience.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	GREG S.	G. FORD	JAMES
	6.5	6.5	5.5

Publisher: Midway
Developer: Midway
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.larushgame.com

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Fantasy Violence
DOLBY PRO LOGIC II
NINTENDO GAMECUBE

A second player can not only jump in at will but also break off and explore the level thanks to splitscreen play.

PS2/XB

THE WARRIORS

You can dig it

G. FORD: Funny that it takes a game based on a 1979 movie to revitalize the on-life-support brawler genre. Granted, *The Warriors*, a cult classic about the titular gang's run through the gauntlet of hoodlum-infested New York City, is perfectly suited for adaptation, what with its seedy setting, loveably weird gangs, and no-one-goes-alone mantra—which means you always have at least one partner for the often sizable brawls.

But while the source material and slick presentation may draw you in, the varied (and almost uncomfortably brutal) gameplay will have you coming back. The action is solid but would get stale on its own. Luckily, this NYC is alive with options for up-and-coming gangbangers: lift car stereos by spinning the left analog stick, break into jewelry stores with a meter-stopping minigame, or tag over an enemy's mark like in *Jet Grind Radio* (DC/XB).

And all that's just optional stuff; the missions have you rumbling one minute, running away the next, then trashing a rival gang leader's art collection soon after.

Unfortunately, you'll also find yourself wrestling with the camera and targeting in larger fights, and occasional slowdown hampers the otherwise-great two-player action. But the game's breadth more than makes amends (peep the sidebar). As it is, *The Warriors* stands as one of the best licensed games of this generation and one of the best brawlers since the days of Billy and Jimmy Lee.

BRYAN: *Streets of Rage, Final Fight, Double Dragon*—all household names to brawler fans. Well, go ahead and add *The Warriors* to that esteemed list. And don't worry if names like Rembrandt and Cochise sound foreign; the movie is the perfect backdrop for a beat-em-up, and the game's so faithful to this '70s film (dead-on cutscenes, excellent voiceovers) that it'll convince newcomers to rent the DVD. Also, *The Warriors* doesn't fall victim to the classic genre blunders: The missions never feel repetitive (running—and fighting—for your life [illegible] adrenaline rush); [illegible] too many enemies, [illegible] deaths; and the ga[illegible] tem that's gruesomely rewarding. G. Ford [illegible] my gripes with the game, but none of them should stop you from coming out to play.

JUSTIN: You're running low on cash so you bust a car window and lean in to snatch the stereo...but some wannabe good samaritan spots you and makes to call the cops. You spin the left analog stick to loosen the last few screws, grab the merchandise, then collar the guy just as he reaches the phone booth. Might as well mug him—his pocket change will buy a hit of flash (the game's narcotic health power-up). Now he's got two reasons to call the cops. Despite some pointless filler, a good story, and spontaneous moments like these make *The Warriors* worth it for anyone willing to explore a bit of urban ultraviolence.

New Objective
[illegible]

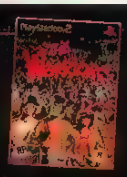
Play Nice, Boppers

The Warriors has more than just its sublime story. Play well, and you'll unlock scads of side missions—help feed some bums, protect your turf—in the take-it-at-your-own-pace Coney Island environment. Even better: five flashback missions that show you how the Warriors' members earned their vests. Then you've got rumble mode, which involves brawling, capture-the-flag, spraying, brawling, wheelchair racing, and possibly more brawling. Good stuff.

Young Rembrandt had trouble [illegible]

What's the Diff? Actually, we don't know yet. While the PS2 version of *The Warriors* was ready for review, the Xbox version was still getting buffed up for its debut. If it turns out to feature more than just cosmetic changes and/or some minor slowdown fixes, we'll let you know.

Good: Varied gameplay, solid controls, superb presentation
Bad: Some camera and targeting problems
It's Worth It: Play through all the flashback missions



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)		
8.5	8.0	8.5
G. FORD	BRYAN	JUSTIN

Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Rockstar Toronto
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Mature

www.rockstargames.com

PS2/XB

ONLINE (PS2/XB)

BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD

We've already fought this war

It's not a [illegible] sim—but when [illegible] squad orders, you [illegible] some fancy [illegible]

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.5	8.0	9.5
	DEMIAN	JAMES	CHE

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Gearbox
Players: PS2 1-2 (2-4 online or system link), XB 1-2 (2-4 online or system link)
ESRB: Mature
www.capcom.com

Good: Tough, realistic battles
Bad: Sometimes stupid allies like to get shot
Unnecessary: Another WWII game on a yearly sequel schedule

DEMIAN: Hold up. The last *Brothers in Arms*—which I loved, by the way—came out in March. 2005. Like eight months ago. It is WAY TOO SOON for another *Brothers in Arms* game.

So, what's new? Not much. *Earned in Blood* is a very solid, tactical World War II game—you'll command a couple small squads of soldiers, struggle to pick off enemy grunts while aiming down shaky iron sights, and feel a real sense of desperation as you cower behind cover, bullets whizzing all around. It's tougher, the enemies are smarter (if you do manage to outflank them, they'll often fall back to a new position before you can even get a shot off), and the set of new "skirmish" co-op missions are good fun. Unfortunately, your own soldiers haven't gotten any brainier—all too often my guys would decide to hang around in plain view, getting torn up by machine gun fire and forcing a restart.

Earned in Blood is really a $50 map pack. If you didn't play the first one, you'll definitely dig it—hence the good score—but if you've already fought this war once before, you needn't re-up.

JAMES: I agree with Demian that after eight months, this new *Brothers* is a bit premature. That doesn't mean we're ready to throw it back into the development incubator, though. In fact, *Earned in Blood* makes a great addition to the family. For one, the A.I. is scary-awesome. Try to outwit them, and Nazis will relocate and retreat, like little girls chased by bees. But those bastards won't be shy about gang-banging you if you're hiding in the corner. This is a thinking man's game; jump out and rush like Rambo and not even a pair of well-oiled pecs will save you. The difficulty won't have you curling up into the fetal position, rocking yourself to sleep, however—the game is engaging with all that strategy and, thankfully, plenty of save points.

1UP.COM—CHE: Map pack? Bah! This is the best WWII shooter yet. Just when you thought it was safe to go back to the French countryside, *Earned in Blood* throws more Nazis and hard-as-nails firefights at you than ever before. As a pseudosequel to its predecessor, *Earned in Blood* sports a lot of subtle changes to the series' intense gun battles and on-the-fly squad tactics. While the ebb and flow of the skirmishes remain mostly the same, the beefed-up enemy A.I. and ingeniously difficult terrain make this one of the hardest WWII shooters ever. But then again, who ever said war was easy? The game's obsessive attention to detail is an extra bonus for history buffs and fans of military realism.

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Some innocent devils are more adept at taking on specific types of foes

PS2/XB

CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNESS

Symphonic encore?

SHANE: Even if you enjoyed 2003's PS2 *Castlevania* debut, *Lament of Innocence*, you knew what needed fixing: Its brain-dead level design left players wondering how the same team behind revered PS1 vampfest *Symphony of the Night* (and the awesome GBA titles) could craft a *'Vania* with uninspired stages accessible through a cop-out central hub. Thankfully, all that griping from critics and fans reached the developers, and *Curse* delivers a richer action-adventure experience.

Rather than continue the 11th-century exploits of the last game, *Darkness* springs forward to 1479, positioning itself as a direct sequel to fan-favorite *Castlevania III* (NES). You play Hector, a new character (and former employee of Dracula). He's not your average *Castlevania* hero, and that's a good thing: His abilities to equip all manner of weaponry, summon helpful demons, and act on his own selfish desires make for a more involving, varied gameplay experience. Also, forging your own weapons and monsters adds a tremendous amount of depth, customization, and replayability.

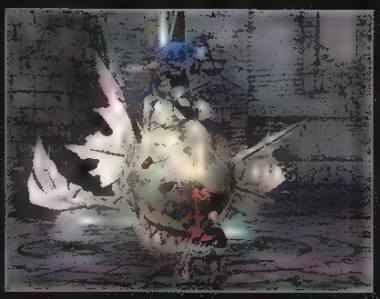
Visually, *Curse* looks a bit inconsistent, but the music and control never falter. And about those level designs—*Curse*'s sprawling trek across Dracula's home turf doesn't quite feel like the intricately interconnected maps from the 2D games, but it's getting there. Even though you're not cooped up in a castle, most areas still feel too straightforward. So, for the next game, how about adding a little more platforming and variety?

SHOE: *Castlevania*-style monster mashing is actually full of yawns. Whipping/slashing an endless procession of gothic creeps only works because the series always offers incentives. In *Curse*, that incentive is to grow your innocent devils by collecting experience points and evolution crystals from fallen enemies. It works for a short while since you're looking forward to the new powers and forms your companions will develop.

Good thing the game gives you other incentives, like being able to pickpocket enemies and gather raw materials to combine into new monster-mashing tools. *Curse* is thus leagues better than its PS2 predecessor, but it still doesn't reach the legendary status of its 2D forerunners, mainly because of a lack of *Metroid*-style open-ended level progression.

CHRISTIAN: The weight of expectations is painful. Eight years on from *Symphony of the Night*, it's still the game all *Castlevanias* are judged against. That's unrealistic. It's also unfair—bringing the enterprise into 3D wreaks havoc with the formula. Still, the team at Konami is trying its best to replicate that game, and it's getting closer.

Exploration—sorely lacking from the last adventure—actually counts for something. Between the stealing, the innocent devils, and the weapon variety, the core gameplay is also a lot more interesting and addictive. The in-game visuals still pale in comparison to the gorgeous character art, though. Maybe a next-gen version can get it right....



Devil Rancher

Curse of Darkness ditches the traditional series subweapons such as holy water and dagger in favor of summoned monsters called innocent devils. It might seem like a gimmick, but these A.I. partners actually add a lot to the gameplay. You'll amass a small army of critters throughout your journey, and each type offers attack and support abilities. And your devils are uniquely yours: The path of your creatures' evolution depends entirely upon what weapons you favor.

You'll summon new devils after boss encounters

Call Him Trevor

Sure, this is actually, like, *Castlevania 16*, but it's secretly the direct story sequel to 1990's stellar *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* for the old 8-bit Nintendo. Several of the characters from that landmark adventure show up here, including hero Trevor Belmont (shown here sporting his new metrosexual redesign).

Good: Deep combat, copious customization
Bad: Inconsistent graphics, not enough platforming
Sweet Preorder Bonus: Rockin' soundtrack CD

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	SHANE	SHOE	CHRISTIAN
	8.0	7.5	7.0

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami Tokyo
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.konami.com

PS2/XB/GC

ONLINE (PS2/XB only)

CRASH TAG TEAM RACING

Crashing and boring

An ice level *and* a lava level, together?! Excuse us while our heads explode.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)		
5.5	3.0	5.0
G. FORD	KATHLEEN	ROBERT A.

Publisher: VU Games
Developer: Radical
Players: PS2 1-2 (2-8 online or system link), XB 1-4 (2-8 online or system link), GC 1-4
ESRB: Everyone 10+
www.vugames.com

Good: Nice balance of racing and action
Bad: Racing events get repetitive, kind of for the younger set
Surprisingly Addictive: The bowling minigames

G. FORD: Though it sounds like a straight-up kart racer, *Crash Tag Team Racing*, a kiddie game through and through, offers a little more variety than your typical mascot kartfest. Perhaps influenced by its work on *The Simpsons: Hit & Run*, developer Radical has mixed in on-foot elements to go along with the racing as you explore the hub world, playing minigames and collecting coins and unlockables.

While racing, you'll crash into obstacles, shoot off-road targets, or try to beat the clock, depending on the mode. *Crash* differs from similar games mainly during the races themselves, as you're able to latch onto another racer and then control a turret or steer the two-man contraption. It's novel, but it certainly won't change the way you look at kart racers.

To Radical's credit, all these disparate elements work well individually; rarely will the controls—or anything else—offend. Problem is, going through the motions in each world and on each track gets soul-crushingly old, extremely quickly.

KATHLEEN: If you press buttons during the loading screens, this game will belch and/or fart. This clued me in to the fact that *Crash* is meant to be a baby game. So, I asked my inner 8-year-old what she thought of the game. She rolled her eyes and said, "It sucks." And then went to play *Burnout Revenge*.

What they've done is mash together a platform/coin-collecting game with a plodding kart-combat racer, then grafted on some escaped-from-a-cell-phone minigames. It's a Frankensteinian mess. Even a really dumb youngling wouldn't enjoy its repeating cycle of racing, chatting, and fetching. Despite popular opinion, most kids have an attention span that lasts longer than a sound bite, but not when you offer them nonsense like this.

ROBERT A: Yeah, it's a racing game, but check out this farm animal skeet-shooting minigame. Those things? Go-karts. But look at these crazy outfits you can buy for Crash! Dress him up like Indiana Jones. Race tracks? Not yet. Take a stroll around the theme park. You can go anywhere! Well, don't go there. That's a bottomless pit. Oops, good thing you can't really die. Speaking of which, you've gotta see all these "comic" death sequences. Collect them all! Fine, we'll drive. How about a stunt session? Let's see how many times we can back flip. Or maybe you'd rather blow some stuff up? You just wanna race? All right, as long as you dig slow and easy cruising on mediocre tracks. Do you?

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New to the console [illegible] but easy single-player campaign that [illegible] from soldier to soldier on your team. [illegible] for online.

Flipping the bird: Eagle-eyed shooters can actually take out individual helicopter passengers—or even the pilot.

PS2/XB

BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT

War is swell

CRISPIN: I can't help but think publisher EA is shooting itself in the combat boot by bringing its dominating *Battlefield* series from PC to consoles. Once players behold the game's chaotic, free-form online-multiplayer combat—the second they hitch a ride in a Black Hawk or drive a tank while someone else mans the machine gun—they're going to lose their fighting spirit when it comes to more rigidly linear EA war games like the *Medal of Honor* series. I know I did.

Because the thrill of these army-on-army shooters—which console players have sampled with the *SOCOM* games and LucasArts' *Battlefront* series—doesn't come from the simple capture-the-base missions or the gritty visuals (lush with thick forests and spectacular explosions here in the identical PS2 and Xbox versions). Rather, *Battlefield* is fun because almost anything can—and often does—happen in the heat of battle. This game is no slave to realism. Every soldier has a parachute for leaping from dangerous heights. Specialized troopers have nifty toys, such as remote-detonating C4 and laser designators for air strikes, that make for a million strategic possibilities. The game rewards players that communicate and work together, but even if you go lone wolf and cause trouble with land mines, you're going to have a good time. Just don't be surprised when you dishonorably discharge all those old offline war games in your library.

JAMES: I know war can be a horrible thing. Trust me—I've played *Ghost Recon 2* on PS2. Who needs an intricate plot playing as Sergeant What's His Name and reenacting The Battle of Who Gives a F*** when you've got games like *Battlefield 2*, which throw you right into Operation Shoot Enemies and Blow S*** Up?

The OK single-player missions include a nifty little feature that lets you quantum-leap from one squad member to another as the situation demands. But putting a cap in some enemy A.I. just doesn't do anything for me, especially when online multiplayer is such a joy. Why play by yourself when you can pilot choppers and rain down rockets or call in an artillery strike on potty-mouthed teenagers online?

1UP.COM—GARNETT: Your PC pals might snicker at *Battlefield* on a console, but after seeing it, they'll be on the couch looking at you with those when's-it-my-turn eyes. And not just because it gets their favorite multiplayer shooter right. They already know the satisfaction of everyone working together online, doing the job of their chosen soldier class. No, it's zapping from one team member to another in single player that will have them green. "Hot-swapping" to the class for whatever job is at hand is a great option, although you need line of sight to swap and can't just pick whoever. Also, the A.I. is occasionally suspect, but getting a fun solo game in addition to the legendary multiplayer just helps round out the experience.

When Time Attacks

Battlefield 2's all-new single-player game isn't the only feature that developer Dice added to make this series more console friendly. You'll also unlock challenges—vehicle races, shooting drills, *Crazy Taxi*-like passenger pick-up modes—that make for fun diversions when you need a little R&R from the shell-shocking war.

You Gotta Try This: Four War-Winning Tactics Based on Advanced Intel From the Game's Makers...

Air Support
Pile four troopers into a helo and fly from one control-point flag to the next. Have a guy parachute to each flag. You'll nab four points in the time it takes the other side to nab two.

Vehicular Manslaughter
Pick a Special Forces soldier and stick C4 onto a speedy vehicle. Drive it straight into a batch of enemies and bail out right before activating the detonator. Serves 'em right.

Death From Above
As a sniper, hop aboard a helo with a friend and have him fly over the tallest building on the map. Parachute onto the building so you can snipe the other team with extreme prejudice.

Point Taken
Slap C4 onto a control point your team has already taken, then go about your business. If the point's icon flashes white on the map, enemies are trying to take it. Detonate the C4 and get 'em!

Good: Chaotic multiplayer battles, hot-swapping in single player
Bad: Needs more online play modes
The One Thing We Miss From the PC Version: Fighter jets

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

CRISPIN	JAMES	GARNETT
9.0	8.0	8.0

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: Dice
Players: 1 (2-24 online)
ESRB: Teen

www.eagames.com

PS2/XB

WITHOUT WARNING

A clown car full of terrorists

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	ROBERT A.	GREG S.	KATHLEEN
	4.5	5.0	1.5

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Circle Studio
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.capcom.com

Good: An attempt at variety with multiple characters
Bad: No actual variety
In Poor Taste: Suicide bombers that run at you like bulls

ROBERT A: As waves of AK-47-wielding Osama bin Laden look-alikes pour out of a tiny storage room like so many clowns from a Volkswagen, I wonder: Is Homeland Security prepared for a thousand dim-witted terrorists to materialize in a chemical plant with a hunk of C4 the size of Rhode Island?

Without Warning, a lackluster third-person shooter (think *Halo* with Master Chief fully visible—actually, don't think *Halo*), investigates the possibility. The game's claim to originality is a cast of six playable characters you rotate through from mission to mission, often catching the same scenario from a different vantage point. It's an interesting concept, but how many takes on "some bearded guys are trying to kill you" do you need?

I'm all for action, but the gunplay here is mindless. Enemies pop out from cover on a timer, much like those in an old light-gun game. And they just keep coming, crawling out of every nook and cranny. The run-and-gun sections are broken up by MacGyver-ish minigames: lock picking, bomb disarming, fuse-box rewiring, etc. These are usually a welcome break, as long as the bin Laden brigade doesn't ambush you from the broom closet.

GREG S: I'm a bit sick of the whole tactical squad-based shooter thing, so *Without Warning*'s single-man-against-the-world setup is kind of a cool throwback. Except that here, you get to play as multiple characters, passing the baton to the next guy between missions.

But it's all so linear. If I don't complete an objective in one mission, I fail the level instead of getting the chance to change something for one of the other characters. It's when you realize this—and the fact that each level plays out in almost exactly the same way despite the various minigames—that *Without Warning* starts to wear thin. So, after about an hour, then.

KATHLEEN: Regardless of your personal politics, this sort of preposterous patriotic pandering is bound to turn your stomach. Suicide bombers were vaguely amusing back in 1991's *Smash T.V.*, but now, not so LOL-worthy. And I'm pretty sure that if the developers didn't get express permission from the creators of *24* to blatantly (and badly) rip off that hit show's premise, they're going to be seeing the losing end of a lawsuit. The story and voice acting offered me several unintentional laughs, but inexcusably stupid elements, such as unskippable cut-scenes and the inability to pick up fallen enemies' weapons, pair with rotten gameplay to make this one of the worst games I've played all year.

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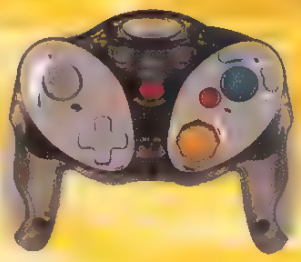

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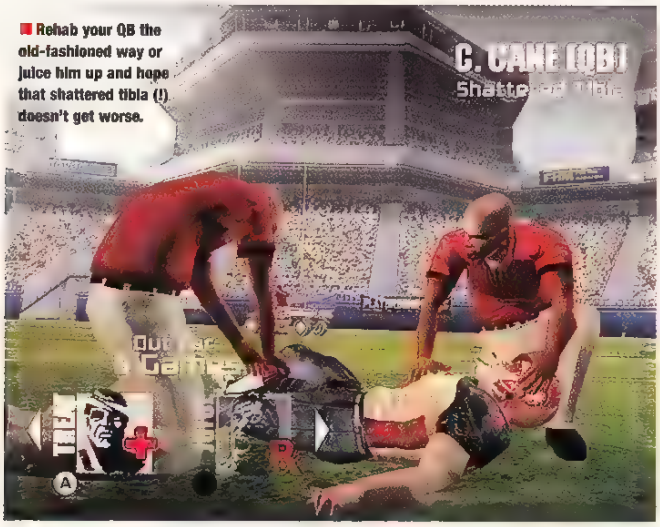
PS2/XB

ONLINE (PS2/XB)

BLITZ: THE LEAGUE

Better wear a mouthpiece (and a cup)



Rehab your QB the old-fashioned way or juice him up and hope that shattered tibia (!) doesn't get worse.

Good: Fresh gameplay, especially for an arcadey title
Bad: Clichéd story line, low-budget cut-scenes
Who's *Blitz*'s Mike Mexico? Google his name and "Michael Vick"

BRYAN: No National Football League license, no problem. After two years away from the arcade-soiled gridiron, *Blitz* gives a big "f*** you" to those uptight NFL execs and, in turn, delivers a performance that'll please any football fan.

Rather than being just another formulaic sports title with fictional teams and players, this one gets down and wonderfully dirty. Tired of gang tackles? Try kneeing the ball carrier in the family jewels. Does spiking the ball after a TD seem passé? Then act like a dog and pretend the goalpost is the nearest fire hydrant. And surprisingly, *Blitz*'s not-suitable-for-Sunday antics aren't just for shock value; smashing an opponent in the head (with his own helmet, mind you) can cause a fumble, or one extra taunt can max out your Unleash meter so that you can slow down time à la *The Matrix* and effortlessly find holes in the D.

Luckily, the mature-rated thrills on the field make up for the clichéd action off it, as the narrative in the single-player game is laughably predictable and, in terms of presentation, the cut-scenes look like the work of an intern...who failed his final college project. But when does football have to be a soap opera, anyway?

G. FORD: Ditto. I totally dig the direction *Blitz* has taken now that it's no longer handcuffed by the NFL. The arcade-style 8-on-8 play works great, with games going by at an efficient pace and scoring happening fast and frequently. And the cheesy story—complete with quarreling owners, juiced players, and flirty cheerleaders—kept me as hooked as any *Madden* franchise mode has. So it's a shame that *Blitz*'s game-day atmosphere is hurting. A generally low-key crowd, stoic announcer, and poor voice acting all contribute to killing the XFL-meets-WWE mood. Good gameplay always takes precedence over atmosphere, though, and *Blitz* has that down.

GREG S: I agree, losing the NFL license is the best thing that ever happened to *Blitz*—it's finally the hardcore, over-the-top pigskin game *Blitz* is supposed to be.

For casual fans like me, the game's solid, arcadey action and story-driven season mode offer a great alternative to the stuffy confines of other football sims. The on-field action is very user-friendly, too, allowing a scrub like me to actually compete with NFL aficionados like Bryan and G. Ford in the nigh-flawless online mode.

And I just love having the options to bet on my own team's performance, juice my players, and aim to shatter the bones of opposing QBs. Chalk up one new *Blitz* fan.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

BRYAN	G. FORD	GREG S.
8.0	8.0	9.0

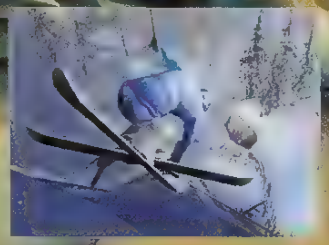
Publisher: Midway
Developer: Midway
Players: PS2 1-2 (3-4 w/ Multitap, 2 online), XB 1-4 (2 online)
ESRB: Mature
www.blitzleague.com

PS2/XB/GC

SSX ON TOUR

Cooling down

EA hearts Nintendo GameCube's *On Tour* gets Mario and co.



Good: Snowboarding AND skiing
Bad: No online play
Ouch: Some runs have too many dang trees, dagnabbit

SHOE: "3" may be publisher EA's finest number. Just look at its *Burnout* franchise: The third game in the crashalicious series was so insanely good, it sent No. 2 home crying. Game No. 4, although excellent, couldn't offer the same degree of improvement over its predecessor. *SSX on Tour*? Same deal. If you got to snowboard down *SSX 3*'s awesome, powder-filled fantasy slopes, then *On Tour* will give you that ol' "more of the same" feeling. It's a different mountain, but the action hasn't changed—you'll be freeriding through dense forests, grinding impossibly long rails, and hitting kickers that will launch you to heights sane people weren't meant to go. That'll be just fine for some fans, disappointing for others.

But if you prefer two sticks over one, *On Tour* is the only game in town. Skiing gets its own set of moves and tricks here and nails that *SSX* feel, which means smooth riding and easy-to-pull-off tricks, perfect for everyday gamers who may find stuff like *Tony Hawk* too twitchy.

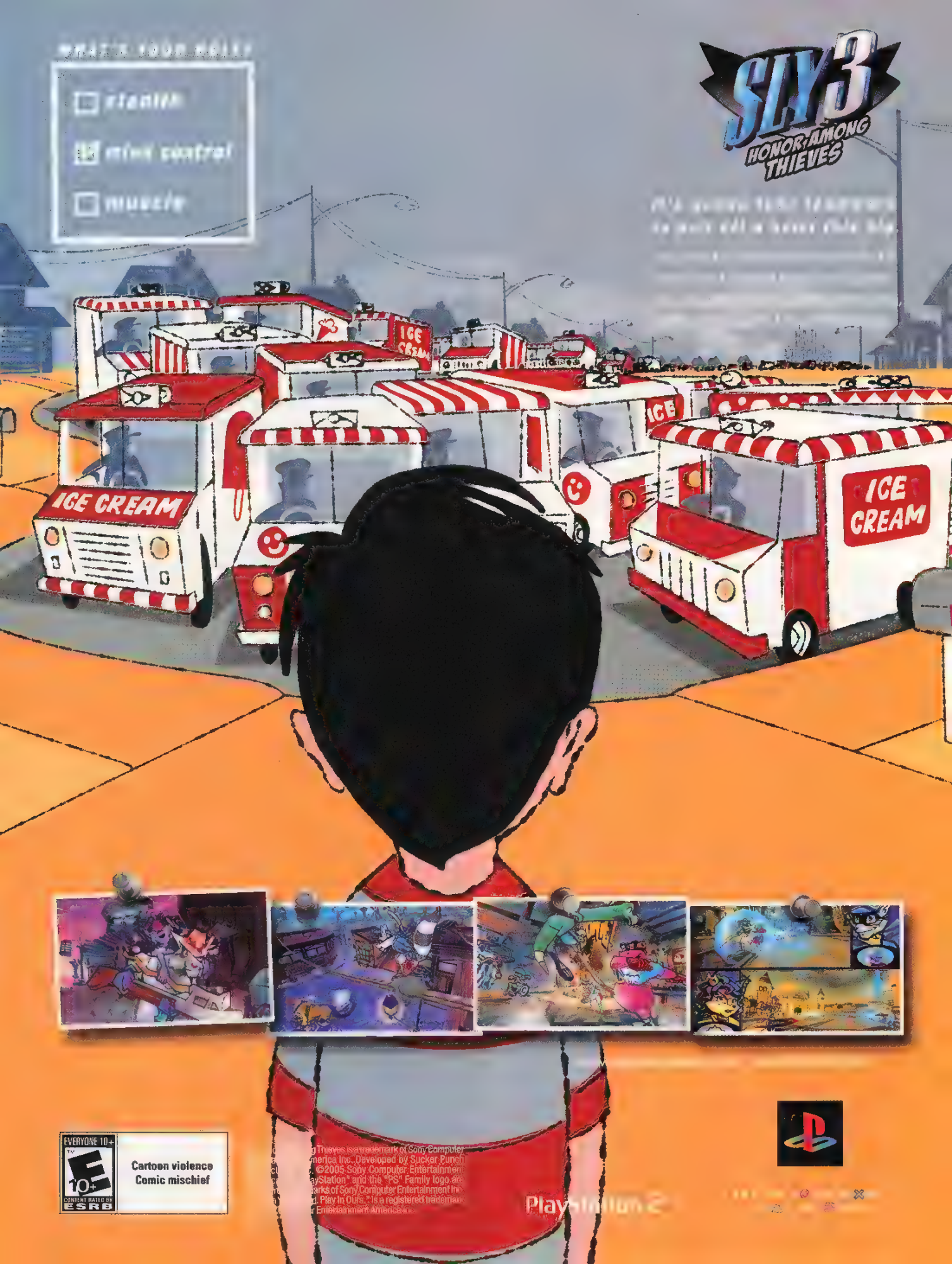
Still, even with the new levels, simpler event progression, and slightly upgraded graphics, this feels too much like my last *SSX* winter getaway. Next season, I want to go somewhere new and exciting.

JENNIFER: I know I've bitched in the past about how I'm over the "extreme" aesthetic in action-sports games. Now here I am, loving all over this wannabe AC/DC version of *SSX* that's so edgy, it gave me paper cuts. But the new vibe is just what *SSX* needed to keep me interested—and keep the series from being little more than *Tony Hawk* on ice. I really dig the mix of frantic racing challenges interspersed with tricks-based missions, and how the game stays compelling with only its basics; you don't have to jump through a bunch of new-for-the-sake-of-being-new hoops. My favorite change is the Goal menu, which keeps you progressing and earning dough even if you get stuck on individual missions. This sort of extreme I can handle.

JOHN: Unfortunately, *On Tour* isn't the best *SSX* game yet. That honor still goes to *Tricky*, but it does bring a completely new, down-to-earth feel to the franchise. If coolness were quantifiable, *On Tour* would score high thanks to the stylish hand-drawn menu graphics and good soundtrack. However, what it's gained in style, it has lost in personality. The switch to creating your own character makes it somehow blander than before, and the fantasy aspects of previous games are completely gone—no more pinball levels or crazy roller-coaster grinding challenges. The net result of all this is that now it's "just" a good snowboarding game instead of something far more than that.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHOE	JENNIFER	JOHN
8.0	9.0	8.0


SLY 3
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ICE CREAM
ICE CREAM
EVERYONE 10+
E
10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Cartoon violence
Comic mischief
PlayStation 2

The Bert slide looks great in motion (and in *Dogtown and Z-Boys*), but it's not that useful.

PS2/XB/GC

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

ONLINE (PS2/XB ONLY)

Same cool s***, different pile

Good: New tricks, big city, no loading times
Bad: Few skate competitions, weak missions
Lamest Mission: Get a black widow spider tattoo on your chest

JAMES: Another *Tony Hawk* game...when the series finally has more sequels out than *Rocky*, Freddy Krueger, and, uh, *Amateur Hotties*, will we finally get to take a breather? But *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland* tells us that it'll be different from all the others: "It won't be just linking up skater tricks for a high score; you do your combos in a load-free environment...and there's a bike," whispers *Tony*, seductively, possibly while reclining in a bathrobe.

As usual, the game has some new moves, but I didn't find them too useful. The Bert slide (an old surferesque trick) or the rail stall just makes you lose your momentum. And you'll need all the speed you can get because it's tough to go big in the cramped city limits of L.A. (the city as a whole is large, but each individual area isn't). Strangely, the aforementioned BMX bike you'll hop on now and then is less forgiving and a little clunky to control. The other new tweaks—the revamped story mode and minor improvements like a new balance meter that indicates if you're going to face-plant or recover gracefully—at least show that *Tony*'s still trying.

JENNIFER: If you're wondering what's so different about this *Tony Hawk* that you should take another look at the series after all these years, I can tell you that it ain't much. That said, the game is still pretty solid and well executed—you could do a lot worse if you're looking for some unoriginal videogame entertainment this holiday season. But the only real reason to play this over any previous version is to explore the new levels. And sure, that's always fun, as is stringing together loads of tricks into massive combos—especially online where you get to show off. But I don't really want to build my own skater from scratch, and the convoluted, multipart challenges have got to go.

DEMIAN: *Tony*, you are lookin' *haggard*. Even though I like *American Wasteland*'s country-boy-in-the-city story line much better than last year's *World Destruction Tour*'s, the annual sequels will drive this franchise into the ground if publisher Activision doesn't take a break, and soon.

In *Wasteland*, you start out with a limited selection of tricks (you can't even wall ride) and then gradually add stuff to your repertoire by completing challenges and furthering the story. Most of the game involves building up your "skate ranch" (think Neverland Ranch, but with fewer grabbing tricks. Ba-dum!) with scavenged, repurposed urban detritus that you earn through challenges. But really, that stuff's just filler; *Hawk*'s best moments are still all about impossibly long combos. That much never seems to change.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JAMES	JENNIFER	DEMIAN
	7.0	7.5	7.0

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Neversoft
Players: PS2/XB 1-2 (2-8 online), GC 1-2
ESRB: Teen

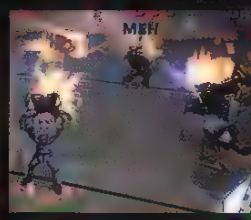
www.activision.com

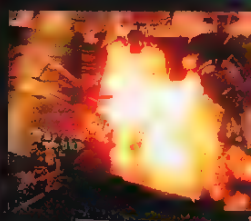
PlayStation 2 ONLINE

RATCHET: DEADLOCKED

Happiness is a warm chicken gun

Clank may be semiretired, but the quiet life's not for Ratchet.





Good: So many ways to customize your weapons
Bad: Needs more platforming segments
Clank: No longer a playable sidekick

BRYAN: Talk about a major case of sequelitis—this makes four *Ratchets* in four years. But I'm not complaining.

In *Deadlocked*, Sony's little lombax finds himself in a *Running Man*–esque scenario. Yet it's hardly a problem, thanks to his new metallic brute squad. These two surprisingly brainy robots do a superb job covering your back during shoot-outs, and with one press of the D-pad they can hack locked doors or launch an EMP, thus knocking out a turret's heavy defenses. Also, *Ratchet* still packs the best (and most customizable) weapons around; not only does the robust modding system enable you to alter features such as a gun's rate of fire and ammo capacity, but you can also swap in and out special upgrades that'll, say, freeze enemies or shower them with napalm. And even though the series seems to be on the path of becoming a pure shooter (which it does very well), I would like to see a few more sections that reflect its platforming roots.

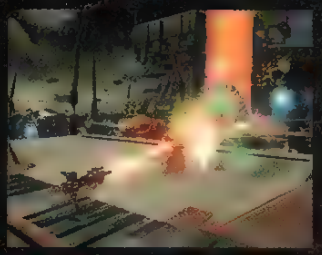
As for multiplayer, *Deadlocked* again succeeds online, but it's the new splitscreen co-op feature for the main game that's the nicest touch.

KATHLEEN: OK, well, these other guys loved it, but *Ratchet* never managed to satisfy me in any of its new suits. I'm just not a fan of the weapon selection system, which sometimes stops the action in single player and can be crippling in multi, and I found the camera problematic at times, too, especially in co-op.

On the upside, your robot helpers (why couldn't one of them have been the lovably dry-witted Clank?) are refreshingly useful. The story and dialogue surprised me—they're actually witty, and not at all nails-on-a-chalkboard annoying like most mascot-and-sidekick games'.

I feel like *Ratchet* tries too hard to be something it's not. The wee little platform game transitioning to big, bad first-person shooter just didn't totally work for me.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE: What do you get when you remove almost all the platforming elements from one of the best platforming franchises around? You get *Deadlocked*, a funny, fast-paced, and entertaining—but ultimately shallow—shooter. The game retains its satirical sense of humor, but the removal of the adventure side of the formula means a rather weak story and precious little character development, two of the series' hallmarks. Luckily, the game still has (perhaps even enhances) the rewarding pace of the series, in which upgrades pour in at a supremely satisfying rate. Pity the online game wasn't tweaked a little more; it's still as speedy, goofy, and simple as *In Up Your Arsenal*.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	BRYAN	KATHLEEN	JOE
	8.0	6.0	8.0

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Insomniac
Players: 1-2 (3-4 via Multitap, 2-10 online)
ESRB: Teen

www.playstation.com

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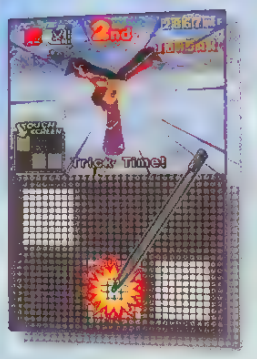

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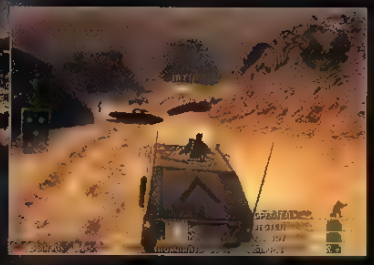
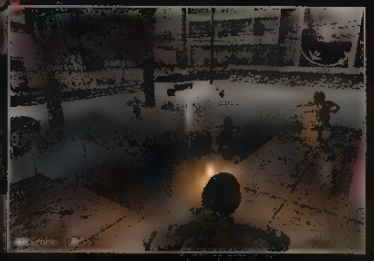
PlayStation 2

SOCOM 3: U.S. NAVY SEALS

A single-player quagmire, but an online victory



Killer skills: The SEALs learned to drive and swim.



MARK: If they allow videogame footage, I seriously think *SOCOM 3*'s single-player game has a shot at *America's Funniest Home Videos*' $10,000 prize. You can almost hear original host Bob Saget's lame voiceovers as the A.I. bungles its way though this squad-based shooter: Your partner runs up next to a C4 charge you just planted ("Hey, watcha doin'?" BOOM!); an enemy tank misses a troop carrier right under its nose ("Duuuh, anyone seen my glasses?"); grunts riding shotgun ignore rival vehicles, then can't drive when you swap spots ("Derr, sorry, I never got my license!"). It's sad that two years after *SOCOM II*, the A.I. has improved so little.

Ditto for the graphics. The new missions are impressively huge, better tied into the story, and far less frustrating thanks to checkpoint saves, but the visuals are muddled and blurry, well below the status quo for a modern PS2 game.

Thank gawd for multiplayer. *SOCOM 3* comes up big again with awesome new vehicles, huuuuuge maps, an unbelievable 32-player limit (even if it lags just a bit), and modes that take full advantage of all of it. I really want to stress the vehicles—superbly balanced and just plain fun, they add an entirely new and thrilling aspect to the game while still emphasizing the cooperative bits that made it so great in the first place (try manning a tank by yourself and you'll see what I mean). So if, and only if, multiplayer alone can justify a purchase in your book, *SOCOM 3* is a go.

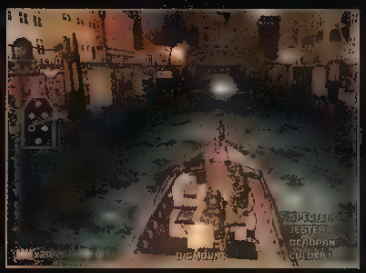
CRISPIN: Now in their third tour of duty, the SEALs of the *SOCOM* games are looking grizzled, taking their battle to the terrorists in drab environments that show that this series has reached the end of its service on PS2. But despite Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's comments, you no longer have to go to war with the army you have: Armchair commandos now have another modern-day online console battle to choose—*Battlefield 2*.

So which of the two should you lock and load? *Battlefield* looks deadlier, delivers faster-paced fights, and comes with a slicker selection of vehicles (where's the air power, *SOCOM*?). But if you want more realism from your warfare, reenlist with *SOCOM*. Its 32-player battles—that's eight more than *Battlefield* supports—feel more epic, and strategic play is encouraged here, if for no other reason than to avoid twiddling your thumbs after losing your one life in a no-spawn game.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE: If you were worried that vehicles and the doubling of the player limit in online games would make *SOCOM 3* a more frag-happy, arcadey experience, worry no more. The changes do make a difference, to be sure, but in the opposite direction: Games are now much more strategic, and yet also much more exciting, especially given the superlative map design. The real surprise, though, is that the single-player game is more entertaining as well. By adding checkpoints and more enemies and raising the stakes a bit in terms of unlockable items (for use online), developer Zipper added some real motivation to play solo before diving in online. Overall, it's an impressive retooling of an already excellent game.

We Got a Great Big Convoy

Our favorite new multiplayer addiction? That's easy: *SOCOM 3*'s convoy mode. Terrorists try to get one of two trucks to a loading zone and then an extraction point; SEALs try to stop them by killing all the terrorists or blowing up the trucks. It's not only a brilliant use of the new vehicles (they are key for escorting and defense), but an exciting mix of sniping and other tactics. Give it a try and see if you don't get hooked.



Good: Addictive, fully loaded multiplayer
Bad: Silly single-player A.I. and blah graphics
Eerie: Flooded-city missions

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	MARK	CRISPIN	JOE
	8.0	8.0	9.0

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Zipper Interactive
Players: 1 (2-32 online or system link)
ESRB: Mature
SOCOM3.playstation.com

FORGOTTEN REALMS

THE NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

R.A. SALVATORE

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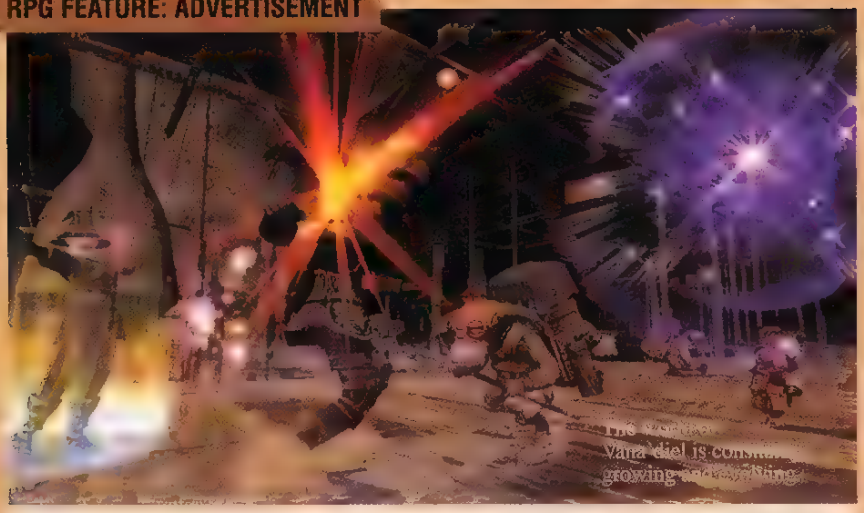

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"The choices are endless, and they are all yours."

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Blood
Mild Language
Violence

Game experience may change during online play

■ *Dragon Ball Z* creator Akira Toriyama did *DQ8*'s distinctive character designs.

PlayStation 2

DRAGON QUEST VIII: JOURNEY OF THE CURSED KING

Finally, another worthwhile fantasy

GREG S: The role-playing game genre has been searching so hard for a new identity the past few years that the traditional, straightforward RPG is almost an endangered species. The days of linear story lines, simple experience systems, and traditional turn-based battles are fading fast. So it's weird that *Dragon Quest VIII*—publisher Square Enix's major game this season—is actually a throwback to those simpler times.

Don't be disappointed, though. While it's not terribly innovative, *DQ8* offers a traditional RPG experience that gets all the fundamentals absolutely right. It's proof that perhaps the old-school RPG design philosophy that everyone's trying so hard to leave behind isn't really so broken after all.

Everything about *Dragon Quest VIII* is polished, from the traditional turn-based battles to the skill system that's deep enough to allow decent character customization while still being accessible. The random battles in each new area are challenging at first, so each skirmish isn't just a two-minute exercise in pressing the X button.

With its solid gameplay and epic quest, *DQ8* saves the RPG genre this holiday season...and helps numb the sting of *Final Fantasy XII*'s seemingly endless development cycle and *Zelda*'s new 2006 release date.

JUSTIN: While many role-playing games pay homage to tradition, *Dragon Quest* maintains tradition and basically pays homage to itself—not that it doesn't deserve a few props. In addition to following its classic RPG formula almost to the letter, including text message play-by-play as you slay monsters in turn-based battles, *DQ8* offers a beautifully realized world for your exploration. You won't find much off the beaten path other than wonderful scenery, but seeing every individual tree in a sprawling forest provides a great sense of scale.

It's still far too old-fashioned to call a must-play, but *Dragon Quest VIII* will definitely satisfy curiosity or nostalgia. Anyone new to the series can sample the biggest name in Japanese RPGs wrapped in a beautiful presentation, while series fans know just what they're in for.

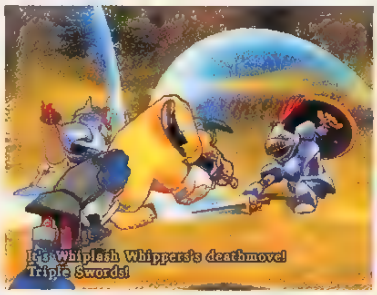
OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: *DQ8* is so freaking big that it's almost like the dandy RPG fan's answer to *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. And it's proof that taking an old-school gaming formula and giving it a dazzling face-lift can actually work. *DQ8* may play like it's 1995 (well-refined 1995, but still 1995), but it's also easily one of 2005's best-looking PS2 games. On top of 60-plus hours of questing, you also get neat side quests like casino gambling, monster training, and item creation (via the alchemy pot). Even the game's very, very British voices are a hoot.

Newer RPG fans may complain about its constant turn-based battles and slow-paced leveling, but no matter how you feel about the gameplay, *Dragon Quest VIII* will certainly be the longest RPG in your collection.

Slimy Hands

Game-peripheral maker Hori has announced that it will release the bizarre *Dragon Quest* slime controller Stateside when *Dragon Quest VIII* ships. For $39.99 you too can control the latest *DQ* adventure with a giant, blue, rather uncomfortable slime. And the ladies love it.

■ Embarrass your friends by beating them at *Madden* with this bad boy.



Good: Solid gameplay, interesting story, fantastic presentation
Bad: Linear quest might turn off some folks
Free: *Final Fantasy XII* demo bundled with every copy of *DQ8*

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	9.0	8.0	9.0
	GREG S.	JUSTIN	SCOOTER

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix/Level ■
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.dragonquest8.com

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PlayStation 2

JAK X: COMBAT RACING

ONLINE

Car combat, not really evolved

Jak's cars are fragile—two or three missiles up the rear and you're really hurtin'.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)		
7.0	7.0	6.5
G. FORD	BRYAN	KATHLEEN

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Naughty Dog
Players: 1-2 (2-6 online)
ESRB: Teen

www.us.playstation.com

Good: Gameplay variety, fun multiplayer
Bad: Floaty controls
Not as Controversial: *Jak X*'s unlockable Hot Coffee chip

G. FORD: Life as a successful Sony mascot ain't all roses. Save the world three times and the company rewards you with the obligatory kart-racer appearance. And while it seems like Jak and co. would be better suited to a genre less cliché, the transition isn't too bad.

In *Jak X*, you'll be guiding bigger dune buggy–like vehicles instead of typical go-karts as you race to win an antidote to a...ah, who cares—back to the dune buggies. As they are essentially lightweight frames strapped to engines, *Jak X*'s vehicles have a light, floaty feel. It's not hard to get used to the powersliding/weapon controls that are similar to other racers', but thanks to the bumpy, twisting (though nicely varied) tracks, you'll often lose control of your hop-happy vehicles and get turned around or end up facing a wall. Depending on your vehicle choice, this can be highly frustrating.

And while this problem might kill a lesser game, *Jak X* delivers smooth, intense online action and a solid variety of game types, including a take-out-the-drones death race and an entertaining sport hunt in addition to typical races. Nothing spectacular, but satisfying nonetheless.

BRYAN: Sure, *Jak X* won't make folks forget about *Mario Kart*, but I'd still put it on the podium with Nintendo's beloved racer. Unlike most titles in the kart genre, this game ain't afraid to mix up the action; while it's got plenty of modes that involve taking the checkered flag, *Jak X* also throws some enjoyable curveballs, such as turbo dash races, where you earn points for collecting turbo power-ups and hauling ass until your boost is gone. This wide variety really helps keep *Jak*'s multiplayer engine running smoothly (especially online). Still, Greg's right on about the handling; too many times I found myself spinning out of control and calling for the meat wagon.

KATHLEEN: I can't believe these guys didn't mention the utter *humiliation* I delivered unto them via my sweet little pink and purple custom-paint-jobbed death buggy. Destroying my foes with my girlie-mobile in widescreen progressive scan sure looked pretty, but, unfortunately, none of the game modes (both single and multiplayer) really rose far above the level of ho-hum, seen-it-crashed-it. Rush hour and death race modes have you smashing head-on or shooting unarmed drones, which just made me feel like a cheap pink bully. Maybe Jak and Daxter should let *Burnout Revenge* handle the growing needs of the combat-racing crowd.

PlayStation 2

GUITAR HERO

Rock 'n' roll fantasy

Guitar Hero, for all your cock rock needs.

Guitar Hero controller: We can't wait to play *Soul Calibur* with this thing.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)		
9.0	9.0	9.0
JENNIFER	MARK	JOE

Publisher: RedOctane
Developer: Harmonix
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.guitarherogame.com

Good: The guitar controller. It's got a *whammy bar*
Bad: Soundtrack's all rawk, all the time
Possibly Easier: Learning the basic chords on a real guitar

JENNIFER: I started playing guitar two years ago, so this was like a dream for me. The included guitar controller feels so natural, and it's so simple getting into the rhythm-action groove, pressing buttons on the neck to match the patterns scrolling down the screen. It's like I advanced 10 years in skill by just pressing the start button, a feeling that karaoke or air guitar—even the greatest teacher in the world—can't provide. The spot-on rock anthems, from Joan Jett's "I Love Rock 'n' Roll" to Boston's "More Than a Feeling," might not be on my iPod, but within minutes I became intimately familiar with them, once I could actually play all their fantastic riffs.

Early on, the normal difficulty seems too easy, but I guess getting cocky is what rock is all about, and you know there's always a fall. Two-thirds of the way through, the notes start coming so fast and furious you won't know what hit you. Was it all the sex and drugs that kept me from nailing the climactic solo in my No. 1 hit—oh wait, I wasn't actually a rock superstar.... Alas, even guitar heroes have to practice.

MARK: Technically, *Guitar Hero* has the chops. The guitar controller is sturdy enough, with a sweet whammy bar and wailing sensor inside, and great care has obviously gone into the order and timing of the button presses (including hammer-ons and pull-offs) to really make you feel like you're playing each song. The overall style is pitch-perfect as well, with cool concert-poster menus, a roadie-taught tutorial, and a sound level that goes to 11. But here's the question, man: Does it *rawk*? In the words of David Lee Roth, "F*** yeah!" From predictable slam dunks like "Smoke on the Water" and "Ironman," to recent hits like "No One Knows" and "Take Me Out," to awesome surprises like "Ziggy Stardust" and "Unsung," it's hard to imagine a better song selection for shredding. It. Up. *Guitar Hero* will knock you on your coal-mining ass.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE: I am frankly astonished by how much playing this game feels like playing the guitar for real. On its easiest difficulty it allows wannabe ax-slingers to rock out with no training necessary (including whaling on the totally awesome whammy bar). But on its hardest difficulty it's as close to playing the song on a real guitar as it's possible to get in a game. The package as a whole is a bit lacking in frills and extras, but to my mind this issue is more than balanced by the amazing song list, which is populated by undeniably classic guitar tracks from the '70s onward, with only a few clunkers. If you have a rock-star bone in your body, you want this game.

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PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

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UBISOFT

Pay attention to *Soul Calibur's* nonsensical story at your own peril—just know that undead pirate Cervantes and his daughter Ivy don't get along so hot.

PlayStation 2

SOUL CALIBUR III

Costume party on the stage of history

SHANE: While it's a shame that the console with the weakest version of *Soul Calibur II* now plays host to the only iteration of *Soul Calibur III*, even the most uppity fighting-game fans should give it a chance. Don't expect a reinvented franchise, though. Two years of progress haven't changed the fundamental gameplay much at all: Everyone moves a bit faster, some moves require different input, and everyone has a new maneuver or three. And the visuals haven't progressed terribly much, either: *SC3*'s characters, colorful stages, and occasional slowdown seem fully interchangeable with those in the previous game. This might all sound somewhat disheartening, but *Calibur* is still the finest fighting game of the year, no question.

So, what's the secret of *Soul Calibur*'s appeal? Massively addictive gameplay. Intricate move sets, responsive control, and creative characters (all three newcomers are keepers) make *SC3* a tough beast to put down, especially once you and your buddies graduate to high-level play. Plus, if your sparring partners aren't around, a pile of single-player modes and unlockables will keep you occupied until your next challenger arrives. The new character creation mode handily rises above the half-baked Chronicles of the Sword real-time strategy minigame as the best of the new time wasters—it's surprisingly simple to craft a stylish and unique pugilist in mere minutes.

One caveat, though: You're going to be pissed off when Namco announces a better-looking version for a rival console in the coming months. You just know it's going to happen...

DEMIAN: Bigger, stronger, maybe a tiny bit faster—every *Calibur* character seems to be more powerful than before, in a few significant ways. But this fighter's essence remains unchanged; it's still easy to pick up and play, with great depth for those who take the time to really learn the game.

The aforementioned Chronicles of the Sword mode is a head-scratcher at best, but the character creation option is the biggest addition to the series by far. Sure, most gamers might only use it to make about 90 different versions of battling schoolgirls and French maids, but the combat and costume options are incredibly diverse. I'm disappointed that *Calibur* isn't multiplatform (the graphical slowdown during certain special moves might not affect gameplay terribly, but it's still annoying) and isn't online—don't even get me started.

1UP [illegible]: *Soul Calibur III* makes a valiant effort to hook fighting-game nonfans with a collection of distractions, but I'm afraid there's not a lot here to keep 'em hooked for long. What, me worry? Fighting games should be made for the hardcore, and thankfully, *SC3* has plenty to offer returning fans. Changes to the basic fighting system (a faster pace, *SC1*'s two-input-high-low guard impacts, breakable and low-standing walls) are negligible—the real changes come in new move sets and character balance. (Vets will need to hit *SC3*'s training mode to learn all the tweaks.) I won't whine about the lack of online support, but I'm just say I *anxiously* await *Soul Calibur IV*.

Playing God

Soul Calibur III sports a full-featured character creation mode that lets you choose your warrior's gender, appearance, and move set. You can make some fantastic-looking fighters, and even characters with combat styles absent from the default roster of *Calibur* heroes. It's a shame that you can't do much to alter the appearance of the premade fighters, though. De-Elvis-ing that fop Maxi might have sealed the deal.

Chronicles of the Sword
SC3's strangest new mode has got to be this ill-conceived, slow, and sloppy real-time strategy game. It's woefully out of place, and only the most dedicated fans will suffer through it for the unlockable goodies.

Good: Smooth, responsive gameplay, custom characters
Bad: Minimal improvement to the core game
Real Men (and Women): Play with joysticks

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHANE	DEMIAN	CHE
9.0	9.0	9.0

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

soulcalibur3.namco.com

How do you learn Sparrow Shot (below)? Pray. Randomness is just part of the game.

PlayStation 2

ROMANCING SAGA

Let's just be friends

Good: More freedom than most RPGs
Bad: Much more confusing than most RPGs
Trivia: It's a remake of the first game in the series

JUSTIN: Like love, romance is tough to define. It's unpredictable, baffling, and heartbreakingly confusing. Square Enix's latest role-playing romp, *Romancing SaGa*, can't promise that things will work out for you, but if you surrender yourself to its mystery, you just might get something out of it.

Unlike most role-playing games, *SaGa* doesn't spell much out. After choosing one of eight starting characters, you're thrust into a world where everything seems alarmingly random. "What the hell am I supposed to be doing?" moments abound, but when you have no idea what you're "supposed" to be doing, stumbling onto new characters and events somehow feels more urgent and real. Battles have similar ups and downs. Learning a powerful new technique out of the blue during a desperate fight is thrilling, but if lady luck turns her back on you afterward, you can kiss your new move good-bye—along with any progress you made since your last save...unless you were fighting a battle in which losing is an option. It can be tough to tell. If you live for the moment, *SaGa* has some great ones. If you don't want your heart broken, you'd better stay away.

CHRISTIAN: *Unlimited SaGa* is the worst game Square Enix has ever published, so I wasn't expecting much from *Romancing SaGa*. I was quite shocked to see many ideas plucked from that game salvaged in this one—and actually functioning.

SaGa offers a heck of a lot more freedom than most console RPGs, with tons of stats, skills, weapons, and attacks to micromanage. Your decisions also actually affect the story (which, alas, is so basic as to be nearly nonexistent).

Now, if they could just manage decent graphics—the game slides dangerously close to PS1 territory at times—ditch the freakish characters, and pen a half-decent tale to go with the gameplay, *SaGa* could finally become a series worth paying attention to.

GREG S: Freedom of choice...or lack of direction? In *SaGa* you'll round out your party with folks you meet through cut-scenes and in pubs, and then choose which missions to complete. It sounds very nice, except that *SaGa* often leaves you wandering around, wondering what the heck you should do next. And when the battle system feels this generic and boring, exploring new areas and dealing with endless encounters ends up being a chore. *SaGa* nearly put me to sleep on more than one occasion—even *with* the frightfully creepy-looking characters.

Romancing SaGa makes its own ladyboy jokes (left), so we don't have to.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.0	6.5	5.0
	JUSTIN	CHRISTIAN	GREG S.

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

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As *RE4* fans know, the game begins after Leon's attempt to replicate Pelé's classic bicycle-kick move goes tragically wrong.

PlayStation 2

RESIDENT EVIL 4

REsurrected, REfined, REdeemed—REjoice

MARK: It's been four years since a proper *Resident Evil* game graced a Sony-branded console, four long years for PlayStation survival-horror fans. That's four years of settling for spin-offs—the ho-hum shooting games like *Dead Aim*, the frustrating *Outbreak* online forays, the entire *Silent Hill* series (just kidding, *SH* fans! Letters won't be necessary!)—but finally, the wait is over. *Resident Evil* is back on the PS2, better than ever.

To say that things have changed a bit since *Code: Veronica X* would be a massive understatement. *RE4*'s new behind-the-back camera may seem like a subtle alteration, but in practice it gives the entire experience a badly needed overhaul, allowing for smoother controls, pinpoint aiming, and a greater emphasis on the excitement of run 'n' gun combat. Enemies no longer shuffle at you two or three at a time; they swarm you in packs, carry weapons (including dynamite and chain saws!), and even break into a sprint now and then. A new inventory system scraps the annoying item crates from old games, and weapon upgrades add strategy and another reason to happily behead your "undead" friends. And the spectacular graphics—originally built from the ground up for the GameCube—lose miraculously little in the transition to PS2. From 30-foot-tall bosses down to the tiny embroidery on Ada's dress, the overall design and attention to detail is among the best in any game. Which really could be said for almost every aspect of *RE4*—don't miss this game.

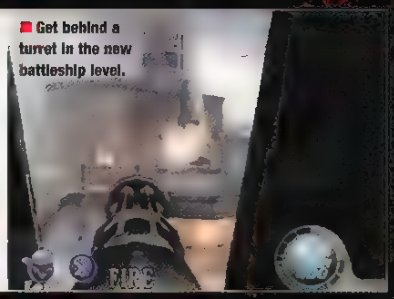
CRISPIN: Oh, presidents' daughters, how many times have we told you to quit getting kidnapped in videogames and forcing us to overcome incredible odds to rescue your cutie patooties? But *Resident Evil 4* takes this dead-as-a-decapitated-zombie plot device and resurrects it in the most compelling game of the year, because everything else here—from the behind-your-guy camera perspective to the improved controls to the lethally xenophobic shambling Spanish villagers—is so new and needed and polished (even if the plot gets silly at times).

But what if you, like me, already played the GameCube original to death? Even though the PS2 version is just as horrifyingly beautiful, and its all-new Ada Wong missions are a nice bonus, you can live without buying this game again. If you have yet to experience *Resident Evil 4*'s intensity for the first time, however, then you just haven't lived at all.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: These guys are right—if you haven't played *RE4* yet, you simply must get this game. It takes the great elements of previous *RE* games and makes them better, while also sucking away everything that, er, sucked. The graphics look snazzy, the action controls well, and the disc practically splatters bonus content all over your face. But if you already have the Cube version, you might want to hold off, as the extra stuff isn't quite worth enough for a double-dip purchase. Still, overall, *RE4* is a great game that is no longer shackled to just one platform.

What's New for PS2

Added to the PS2 version are the forgettable Ada's Report background movies (recycled cinemas and information we already knew) and a series of side missions called Separate Ways (no Journey jokes, please). Though it mostly sticks to the same areas you already explored as Leon in the main quest, this side story does feature a couple excellent new levels, as well as two all-new, very awesome boss fights. If you're a Cube *RE4* lover, a rental is definitely justified.



Get behind a turret in the new battleship level.

Good: Stunning graphics, smooth controls, lots of extras
Bad: Sometimes-silly story, pushover final boss
Allí Está: ¡Mátelo!

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MARK	CRISPIN	SCOOTER
9.5	9.5	9.5

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.capcom.com

PlayStation 2

FATAL FRAME III: THE TORMENTED

Who you gonna call? Ghost...photographers?

The guy at the K-Mart photo center is in for one sweet roll of film. Better spring for doubles.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)		
6.5	7.5	7.0
GREG S.	ROBERT C.	JOSH

Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: Tecmo Zero Project
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.tecmoinc.com

Good: Unique gameplay, great atmosphere
Bad: Repetitive levels; weak story
True Story: *Fatal Frame* is based on a Tokyo haunted mansion

GREG S: *Fatal Frame III: The Tormented* is a strange one—and not just because it's about two gals who photograph ghosts. On the one hand, it's a great, creepy, atmospheric game that doesn't fit neatly into the survival-horror genre. *Fatal Frame* is all about exploration and ghosts—both friendly and vengeful—jumping out at you from all different angles.

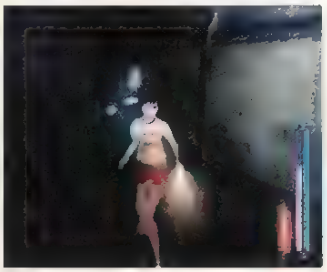
On the other hand, you're stuck exploring the same places over and over and over again. The repetition in *Fatal Frame* starts to grate very early on and just never gets better. The other main issue I have is that the plot development is a very slowwwww burn. The story just isn't interesting enough to milk for this long.

So, basically, you've got solid, fairly unique gameplay, great atmosphere, and very nice graphics wrapped around a weak story and too little content. *Fatal Frame* is worth a play, but only if you've already gone through all the *Resident Evils* and *Silent Hills* in your collection.

ROBERT C: "I want to impale a real priestess real soon." Finding that in a little girl's diary won what passes for my heart. But then, I'd already been hooked by the unusual story, creepy ambience, and shutterbug ghostbusting. It gets a little heavy-handed though—a bit of humor would have gone a long way toward giving the scares more impact and the characters more depth.

I just wish the goals in this game could have been just a little more clearly defined at times. About eight hours in you're asked to find four ghosts in this nook-and-cranny-packed mansion with no direction (if there's a hint there, it needs to be bigger or clearer). I'm all for mystery but not at the expense of enjoyment. The real shame—aside from frustration—is how prolonged searching just kills the eerie mood the game works so hard to create.

JOSH: Playing *Fatal Frame* reminded me why I've historically avoided the survival-horror genre—I'm a huge wuss. I quit trying to play with the lights out when the neighbors complained about all the girlish shrieking. *Frame*'s spooky atmosphere and subtle use of ambient noise and music build a sense of mounting terror that makes the actual enemy and cut-scene scares all the more pants-wetting. The dread eventually evolved into irritation, however, at having to aimlessly wander until something jumped out at me. Once that happened, I started to notice the other reasons I've avoided survival-horror titles—backtracking and simplistic combat—and my screams took on a frustrated, slightly more masculine tone.



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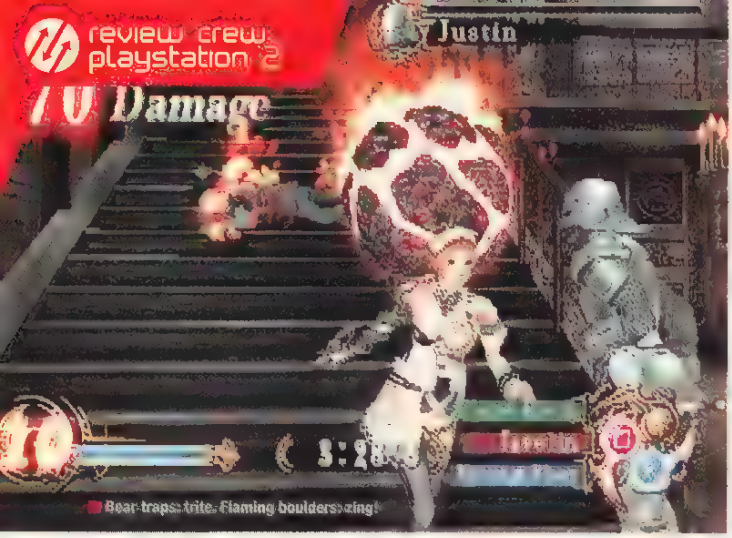
by Rick O'Connor



Bear traps trite, flaming boulders zing!

PlayStation 2

TRAPT

Rage with the machine

Good: Create a Rube Goldberg machine that stabs people
Bad: Too easy to reuse the same traps; Engrish translations
Best Tactic: Stick 'em to a magnet wall. Drop a rock. Repeat.

JOSH: Unlike the classic board game *Mousetrap*, *Trapt* lets you fully indulge those childhood fantasies of crushing, immolating, and impaling your victims. The strange story about a princess setting traps to kill her enemies is packed with plenty of background info on why exactly each person made the hit list—I enjoyed shouting character-specific things as they died, like "Maybe you shouldn't have left your husband!" Try it.

Inventing ways to kill stuff with the level-specific traps is fun, but the finicky camera can cause self-inflicted injuries. Too often I was running around the room, trying to keep the camera on my victim/pursuer, only to run into one of my own devious traps. Delicious irony! But in most cases, your enemies are easily dodged and even more easily outsmarted—not surprising, considering these bright sparks refuse to learn simple things like "Perhaps I shouldn't step into that spike trap yet again." *Trapt* is good fun at first, but its tricks do get tiresome.

ROBERT A: I'll fess up to feeling a tiny tingle of sadistic euphoria when I manage to coax one of *Trapt*'s witless marks into a carefully laid-out set of booby traps. It's not the first one they hit, the swinging pendulum blade or retractable wall of spikes. No, no. The good part is the second trap, the one knowingly placed after the first—the one they stumble onto or fly into while reeling from the first trap's effects. Even better: the third trap, the fourth, and so on. It's kinda like tumbling rows of deadly dominoes.

But as much as I enjoy building giant human mousetraps, the package here is light on content. And without any real guidance, you have to make your own fun. Imagination sold separately.

ROBERT C: I love games that ask me to build a deck of some kind and then battle, and so I'm kind of a sucker for *Trapt*. And I also love any game that lets me launch some moron and impale him on a spinning wheel that throws him onto an electric chair where I can drop an iron ball on his head then slice him with a bladed pendulum. So, yeah, the building-a-deck thing is nice, but *Trapt* really earns a spot in my heart just for making the dreams of my youth come true. And to the genius who put in personal histories of the soon-to-die so I could especially relish ending their lives: Bravo, sir!

I just wish *Trapt* had a little more color (it's way too gray) and a whole lot fewer horrible cut-scenes. To the idiot who scripted those: For shame, sir!

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JOSH	ROBERT A.	ROBERT C.
	6.0	6.5	7.0

Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: Tecmo
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.tecmogames.com

PlayStation 2

SUIKODEN TACTICS

Patching holes in a leaky boat

Good: Informative icon system helps you plan moves
Bad: Terrible cinemas make story sequences tedious
The Story: Takes place both before and after *Suikoden IV*

CHRISTIAN: This generation, it seems like the *Suikoden* series can't buckle down and get things right. Both prior PS2 editions were full of good ideas...and bad ones. *Suikoden Tactics* is, obviously, no exception. Finally, the gameplay has been shaped into something engaging: The numbingly simplistic battles of *Suikoden IV* have been traded in for all-out turn-based tactical clashes with scores of characters duking it out on a grid.

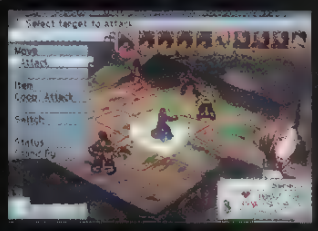
The irony, of course, is that the solid cinematic storytelling of *Suikoden IV*—one of the few things that worked—has been discarded. Instead, we've got a collection of bobble-headed Lego men and not a hell of a lot of drama, though the story takes itself very seriously.

Thus, the focus falls to the gameplay. *Suikoden Tactics* emphasizes combat strategy. The game is pretty unforgiving but takes the edge off by doing a better job than any of its contemporaries at keeping you informed of battlefield conditions and character capabilities, by including user-friendly icons. While the game remains highly conventional, the developers clearly understand what makes games like this interesting and have executed on that knowledge surprisingly well.

JENN F: I love that everything in this game has a *reason*. Every major battle results in a plot point; every character is driven by something. It's as much a sociology course—like, in a good way—as it is an incredible turn-based strategy game. Character relationships even influence gameplay: Making chitchat in battle increases your characters' mutual "goodwill," enabling them to formulate awesome HP-shattering moves.

Menus are never overwhelming, and battle screens stay uncluttered thanks to great visual shorthand. And though Christian may hate the cut-scenes, I found them emotionally engaging—though he's right about characters looking like Lego men, and I don't know why they love to moonwalk between each line of dialogue.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: *Suikoden Tactics* ends up being a decent RPG for strat fans, and a gentle introduction to the genre for *Suikoden* diehards. Oh, for those of you who love the series, I'll say this right now: You won't find 108 stars of destiny, only 54 characters. Despite that, the game is actually a fine prequel to *Suikoden IV*. Gameplay-wise, it's standard fare, with the addition of more menus that indicate what's going on, and a cool elemental mechanic that deepens combat. While it does get difficult later on, tactical RPG veterans might consider this game "too newbie," and the ugly characters certainly don't help its appeal.


It's a lovely game...on the inside.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	CHRISTIAN	JENN F.	SCOOTER
	7.0	9.0	6.0

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.konami.com

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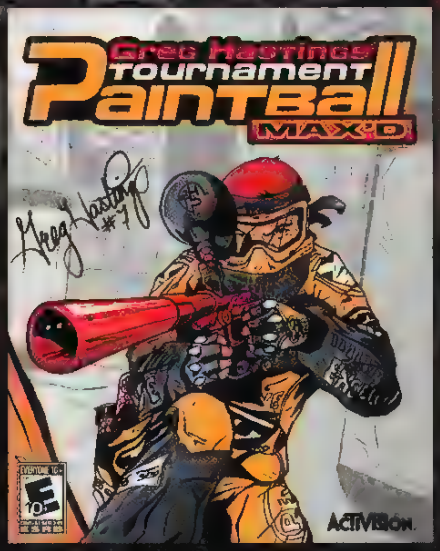

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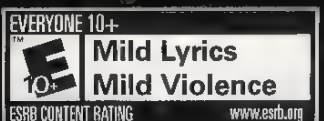

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■ If a bunch lil' chaps in pajamas jumped around our farm house, we'd get the shotgun out tell you what.

■ GameCube

VIEWTIFUL JOE: RED HOT RUMBLE

Monster mash up

KATHLEEN:

ROBERT A:

1UP.COM—MATT:

Tap A-Tap A-Tap-a

While playing *Red Hot Rumble*, your normal course of bewilderment may be interrupted by a VFX battle—a competitive minigame that pops up when a player hits a randomly appearing VFX icon. These battles come in five varieties, and they mostly involve hitting a button at the right time or just whaling on all the buttons all the time—kind of like the rest of the game, then. The loser coughs up a bunch of coins, and then the button-mashing continues.

Good: Pretty fun story, um...colorful
Bad: Chaotic, button-smashing mess
More Like: *Luke-Warm Jumble*

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	KATHLEEN	ROBERT A.	MATT
	6.5	9.0	6.0

It's all your favorite pocket monsters in vaguely unglamorous 3D.

GameCube

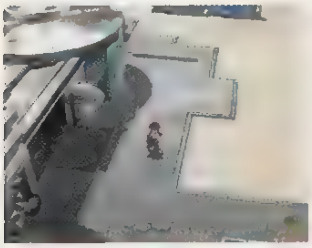
POKÉMON XD: GALE OF DARKNESS

Ain't nothing wrong with a little poke

Good: Finally, a real *Pokémon* RPG for consoles
Bad: Music will make your ears bleed
Import Your Critters: From the GBA games for versus play

BRYAN: Way to go, Nintendo! It took you only roughly four years to bring out the game that Pokémaniacs across the country have been waiting for since the GameCube launched. Sarcasm aside, *Gale of Darkness*—the first fully fledged *Pokémon* role-playing game for the system—is much like the popular handheld installments...and that's a good thing. This one retains the series' simple yet strategic two-on-two battle system (some fights can be damn tough), length (it requires a 40-plus-hour commitment), and addictive nature—once again, you'll find yourself obsessed with catching and training every pocket monster. Plus, like 2004's combat-heavy *Pokémon Colosseum*, *Gale* has the nice option of letting you import your critters from the GBA titles and sending them into the ring for some versus play.

But anything this cute is bound to be annoying in almost equal measure. You'll have to complete a few too many fetch quests, and listening to the in-game tunes is about as pleasant as Sandshrew's nails on a chalkboard. Even so, if you haven't spent quality time with Pikachu for a while, *Gale* is a good series re-entry point.



SHANE: Strange but true: *Pokémon* only seems to really work on Game Boy. Previous attempts to re-create the gotta-catch-'em-all magic on home consoles have faltered, and *Gale of Darkness* succeeds only barely. Unlike the limited *Pokémon Stadium* and *Colosseum* games, *Gale* manages to play like the traditional handheld RPGs, albeit in streamlined, dumbed-down form. Linear to a fault, this game rarely allows you to feel like a true Pokémon trainer—don't expect to wander the wilderness amassing an army of handpicked critters here. The core combat gameplay still sparkles with that mysterious Poké-charm, but mediocre graphics, forgettable music, and a lame, baby-game story line hold the overall quality in check.

1UP.COM—RICHARD: Before even playing *Pokémon XD*, I was gulping down my hate-orade. Its plain graphics, cheesy songs, and prehistoric battle system that resembles a rock-paper-scissor game made me believe that *Pokémon* was only for kids who didn't know what a real RPG was. But after playing 60-plus hours of this beast, I became engrossed with capturing every shadow Pokémon and was muttering, "Gotta catch 'em all." I was also surprised by the difficulty—I launched many F-bombs at the computer for being a one-hit-kill cheater. The battle system is surprisingly complex—if you're unfamiliar with the Pokédex, you will get your butt handed to you. The story is a definite improvement over *Pokémon Colosseum*'s, but the short ending is a tad disappointing.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

BRYAN	SHANE	RICHARD
7.0	6.0	7.0

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Genius Sonority
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Everyone

www.pokemon.com

Saber-toothed tiger or chick on a dragon—whoever wins, it'll look sweet on the side of your van.

GameCube

FIRE EMBLEM: PATH OF RADIANCE

Swords, sorcery, and strategy

CHRISTIAN: Given Nintendo's historic reluctance to release the *Fire Emblem* games in the United States, it's pretty ironic that we've been hit with three games in just two years. This new edition of the series doesn't differ wildly from its predecessors—it delivers grid-based strategy that pits a cast of fantasy characters against the forces of darkness in dozens of turn-based battles.

The biggest difference is the 3D graphics. For the strategy genre, *Radiance*'s looks are above average (check out the archaic state of tactical RPGs on the PS2), though they neither impress nor change the gameplay. What makes *Radiance* so compelling, then, is how just about every element is pitch-perfect. The pacing is excellent. I never tired of the story bits or battles and was always excited to get back into the fray. Some may find the chin-wagging dull, but I think the developers have created entertaining fantasy with snappy dialogue and likable characters.

The gameplay, too, may seem a bit simple compared to the endlessly complex tactical competition, but this keeps things both speedy and intense. The interface is so well designed that any time I lost an ally, I knew it was my fault alone.

This may not be an innovative title, but it's an excellent example of developers really nailing a game's design and clearly shows what separates the experts from the amateurs.

SHOE: *Radiance* teases you with hints of beautiful cinemas. After all, a lot of people like the *Fire Emblem* series for its more human, story-driven take (versus, say, *Advance Wars*' silly filler conversations) on hardcore strategy gaming. But boo to the developers: These gorgeous, emotional cutscenes only pop up here and there, so you're left with a game that's nearly identical to the Game Boy Advance editions, only in 3D. Is that a bad thing? Sorta. I expect a lot of improvements when a handheld title makes the jump to a console. At the same time, the deep, tactical gameplay is still engaging. It's a very solid, if unremarkable, update for the series. If you're an *FE* veteran, stick with it—the more advanced stuff starts kicking in about eight chapters in.

SHANE: After Nintendo transformed its endearing *Advance Wars* (GBA) franchise into the so-so *Battalion Wars* (GC), concern set in that a similar fate might befall sister series *Fire Emblem*. Stand down, surly fanboys: *Radiance* plays exactly like its GBA predecessors. You get the same quick 'n' easy turn-based combat, likeable characters, and decent narrative. It's not a particularly impressive game, though. File the visuals under "adequate," the voice work under "amateurish," and the innovations... und...oh wait, there aren't any.

But familiarity isn't a crime, and *Radiance* delivers a superbly paced and rewarding adventure. From the easy-breezy opening levels to the massive final conflicts (where you command a 19-unit army), the epic battles never disappoint.

An Ancient Saga

Though *Fire Emblem* is best known in the United States as a portable series, the games actually got their start in 1990 on the Japanese NES. Burned by the poor sales of *Final Fantasy* (talk about irony), Nintendo neglected to bring any of the installments here until 2003, when the second GBA edition became the first *FE* to sport English dialogue. If the game's strategy feels a mite familiar, know that it's from Intelligent Systems, the developer of current-day tactical-battling series *Advance Wars*.

Good: Excellent pacing, enjoyable story, great strategy
Bad: Not exactly big on improvements
Finally: They've added an annoying camera

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	CHRISTIAN	SHOE	SHANE
	8.5	8.0	8.0

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Intelligent Systems
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

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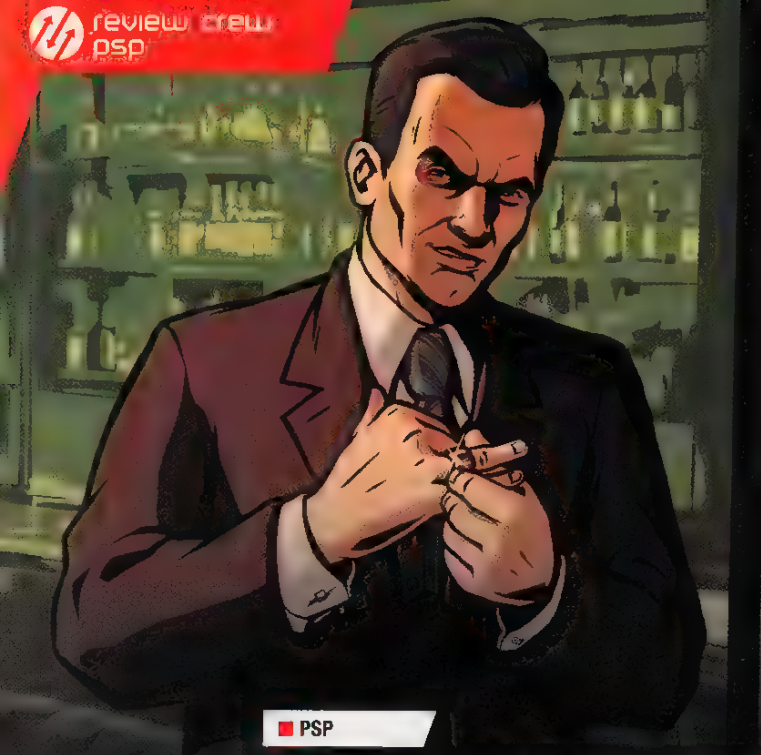


PSP

GRAND THEFT AUTO:

Back-lit, big city

G. FORD: Soon after I began playing the PSP's first entry in the *Grand Theft Auto* series, I stopped on a street corner in Liberty City's Hepburn Heights neighborhood and took in the scene: Some elderly pedestrians shuffle by. A biker knocks over a crossing pedestrian, who gets up, jacks the closest car, and takes off. Ah...it's good to be home.

And *Liberty City Stories* should be a return to familiar territory for many gamers, since it takes them back to the twisted version of New York, known as Liberty City, of *Grand Theft Auto III*, the seminal "do what you want, when you want" 3D sandbox game. So we're back, and I can say it's not just the living-city random A.I. that impresses. In virtually every sense—including the angular graphics, full-fledged radio stations, and controls—*Liberty City Stories* is *GTA*. From the moment you jack your first car and hit the gas with satisfying results, you realize that the developers made many improvements and few compromises. Motorcycles, the ability to shoot car tires, *San Andreas*' handy waypoint system—all stuff not seen in *GTA3*. A local Wi-Fi multiplayer mode also makes a surprising and relatively successful debut, as do some new side quests. (See sidebars for more on each.)

Your trip through the familiar and fresh centers on one Toni Cipriani, a mobster who went on the down low for a few years and is now looking to make a name for himself. Among the game's creative missions, you'll try to please your ma (only to have her put out a hit on you) and even go to confession, where you're drafted to do "the Lord's dirty work." In typical *GTA* fashion, the storytelling is excellent, featuring exemplary voice acting and an appropriate helping of humor.

I have a few (mostly familiar) complaints, though. The PSP's analog nub makes precise movements challenging. Camera controls also prove tricky—you must hold down L to change your view. And then you have the series' Achilles' heel: on-foot targeting. Be prepared to frequently lock on to the wrong dude.

But when you realize the scope of what developer Rockstar has pulled off, your expectations for portable games will change. The game's real beauty lies on those random street corners, though, where you'll discover your own mayhem-filled stories to tell.

SHOE: I have a job to do, you know. As a professional critic, I need to tell you about how *Liberty City Stories*' controls suck ass—it's difficult to drive around without a separate free-look stick (like you have on PS2 and Xbox), and like G. Ford says, shooting/targeting is *still* horribly awkward.

LCS can be near impossible at times. Before you start smashing things, just remember a PSP is a tad more expensive than your typical controller....

Moonlighting

GTA's miscellaneous odd jobs turn its games from 30-some-hour experiences into billion-hour gameplay marathons. Naturally, *LCS* brings in several new distractions. Drive too-slow dump trucks to pick up dumpsters around the city under impossible time limits...or slip into the alligator shoes of a car or motorcycle salesman and offer the right driving experiences to the right customers to close the deal. They're almost all fun, but we just don't have the patience to get the best bonuses. Sell 40 bikes to get the store to generate a regular cash flow for you? Who has the time?

Good: Nails the *GTA* feel and presentation
Bad: Targeting system; sucks up batteries
Load Times: Minimal, in sharp contrast to *Midnight Club 3*'s

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	G. FORD	SHOE	JOHN
	9.5	9.0	9.0

Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Rockstar Leeds/Rockstar North
Players: 1 (2-6 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Mature

www.rockstargames.com

LIBERTY CITY STORIES

GAME OF THE MONTH

I need to tell you about the dark and blurry graphics that'll help keep an entire generation of Lasik surgeons in business. And I need to tell you about the disappointment of playing a new *GTA* in a city that most people are probably intimately familiar with. After all, isn't driving around a brand-new town half the fun?

But a couple hours in, I was driving like a pro. My eyes adjusted to the display (without Lasik, no less!). And familiar locale or not, I was all in. I no longer cared that I'd already spent a 100-hour-long working vacation here as a PS2 mobster—I was loving life again in Liberty City. The new missions kept me glued to my PSP for way, way too long with a mix of weird (like trying to impress my ma or helping the campaign of a cannibalistic politician) and traditional tasks (maybe too traditional: Some are almost exact duplicates of ones seen in *GTA3*, like a sniping job from the same rooftop!). And multiplayer, despite feeling tacked on, works surprisingly well because the open environment is perfect for six people to cause havoc in together.

1UP.COM—JOHN: I'll start by reiterating the bad news: The combat control system is still far from perfect—despite some obvious adjustments to simplify it, it's hopelessly flawed. Many of the more challenging combat missions require you to wander into crowded areas and pick off specific targets while everyone around you opens fire. The now familiar lock-on system is far from intelligent and often results in you unloading a clip into a tree or a building instead of at that Uzi-toting thug who is eroding your health with pinpoint precision.

The true haters will see this as a reason to finally declare *GTA* "broken," but to do so is to ignore the otherwise brilliant design. The game is enormous, and probably the best value of anything on the system because there's just *so much* gameplay here. The core story, divided into three acts, is remarkably complex, and although puerile in places, remains clever and witty throughout. Missions have been optimized for handheld play so that you're never faced with the epic multi-area challenges that make *San Andreas* such a tough game.

I was skeptical about the multiplayer games at first, mainly because getting six PSP players together can sometimes be a challenge in itself. That said, a couple of the modes (notably the car collection game Wedding List) work particularly well with just two players.

Although flawed, *Liberty City Stories* is a remarkable achievement; it shames the efforts that many other developers have put into their PSP games.

Gangs of Liberty City: A Look at GTA's Jump into the Multiplayer Waters

***Liberty City Stories'* biggest surprise is the addition of seven multiplayer modes for up to six players over local Wi-Fi. And while none of these play-together games offers anything revolutionary, it's a first for the series and good fun provided you've got enough coconspirators.**

Liberty City Survivor: A free-for-all or team-based deathmatch. While it's fun to hunt other players, the action boils down to matchups of the iffy lock-on system.

Street Rage: Think of this as the *Midnight Club* portion of the game—straight-up checkpoint races through the city. The best part is making your friends' cars fishtail.

Protection Racket: A multipart affair in which teams take turns defending and then attacking four limos. Entertaining in its chaos.

Get Stretch: *Liberty City Stories'* capture-the-flag variant, only with limos for flags. Your limo has to remain in place while you bring back your opponent's, which can get tedious.

Hit List: Each player takes a turn as the proverbial chosen one that the rest try to hunt down. He who lasts longest wins.

Tanks for the Memories: Rocket launchers, shotguns, and grenades are in plentiful supply as players fight for the most behind-the-wheel time in the map's single tank. Far-away respawn points keep the intensity in check.

The Wedding List: This entertaining mode designates cars that must be collected and then dropped off at certain locations. You'll relish the city-crossing mayhem.

Toni at the NRA meeting.

Nobody likes a show-off.

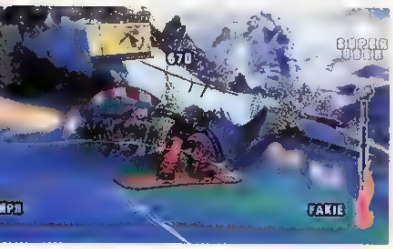
PSP

SSX ON TOUR

Doesn't totally stick the landing on PSP

Good: Pretty graphics, awesome soundtrack
Bad: More repetitive than its console sib
Song Most Licensed by EA This Season: Bloc Party's "Banquet"

JENNIFER: It's unbelievable how a game that's so addictive and enjoyable on the big consoles can lose so much in its transition to portability. Snowboarding and PSP don't go together like chocolate and peanut butter—an action sports game like this requires a lot of hand contortions, for which the shoulder buttons are awkward and the analog nub frustrating at times. It's tough to get really elaborate with tricks; I spent most of my time trying not to wipe out. But those things are tolerable—they simply take some getting used to. My other issues are with the game's design, which has also lost much of what I enjoyed most on the console version. You have only a couple of events open to you at first, and some of them (the tricks ones, especially) are pretty tough. If you don't nail these events off the bat, you're stuck retrying them over and over—boring. God help you if you wipe out on the long half-pipe—your boarder ain't getting air again, and you're better off just starting over. If you're willing to soldier through, the core of the game is certainly solid, and the graphics sure look pretty. This just isn't everything it could have been.



DEMIAN: Unlike my fellow reviewers, I haven't played the console version of *On Tour*, so if this one's missing some revolutionary feature, I'm blissfully unaware. It seems to be missing a story of any description, but what the hell, it's a game about snowboarding. And now skiing, apparently.

The edgy, artsy menus are slightly complicated at first, but keep hitting X and everything works out fine. On the slope, the controls are a little awkward—it can be tough to line up that rail you want to grind, whether you're using the D-pad or going analog, and I'm blaming the combination Boost/Grab button for all my bails. OK, half of my bails.

POCKET GAMES—DAVID: Say what you will about the watering down of the *SSX* franchise—what with the incessant thrumming of EA's "Trax" and that regrettable recession toward more "realistic" snowboard runs—it's still a first-class franchise. The key aspects of what's endeared the series so strongly to both hardcore and casual gamers—namely, buttery smooth controls and meticulously crafted courses—is perfectly ported to PSP, and it looks just lovely, too. Sure, it's still two triggers shy of a console controller's four, the boost and grab functions are mapped to one button, and the load times can be a drag. But sometimes limitations work out for the better: Here, goals and objectives are more apparent and easy to track than in the console version's convoluted, ostentatious front end.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JENNIFER	DEMIAN	DAVID
	7.0	7.0	8.5

Publisher: EA
Developer: EA Sports Big
Players: 1 (2 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.easportsbig.com

PSP

THE CON

We're betting against

That dude's a chick! No, on the left!

Good: Smooth and quick controls, fresh concept
Bad: Load times that'll make you go gray
The Female Characters: Are distressingly burly

JENN F: *The Con* is actually two different fighting games. Arcade mode is a by-the-numbers brawler, while story mode is a game of strategic hustling and planning—decide whether to win or "throw" the round and lay bets on yourself or your opponent. Then fake the fight until all bets are in and suddenly turn the game around at the last second without the crowd noticing the dupe.

The real challenge here is not to accidentally knock out your opponent when you're, say, actually trying to lose to him. This fusion of strategy and muscle makes for nice depth, in theory. But I found myself enjoying plain-Jane arcade and multiplayer bouts more than, you know, winning cash by *having my ass kicked*. Kind of an existential ego-smasher for me.

The controls are fine, if simple—a little swooping and button-mashing will find all the combos. Still, in arcade mode, each match felt weirdly short...with almost unbearable load times that often seem longer than the actual matches, bouts are vaguely unsatisfying.

The premise, however fresh, has completely thwarted my innate bloodthirsty brawler instinct. Combine that with some missteps, and you have a fighting game that is ultimately, cosmically, unfulfilling.

KATHLEEN: I learned a lot playing this little brawler. During its 40- to 120-second load times, I managed to read the latest *Harry Potter*, weave a macramé bandolier (the world's first), and teach my dog to dance. The two to three minutes of actual gameplay between Sisyphean loads isn't awful, but not remotely worth the wait. Over-the-right-shoulder camera and stiff character movement gives way to a fun blocking/dodging element, team building is highly customizable, and the match-throwing element is a solid gimmick. Too bad the story mode is silly, with ugly ghetto stereotypes that smother even the smallest flash of fun.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: The take-out mechanic that allows you to maximize your gambling dollar is pretty cool, and the over-the-shoulder camera gives a neat *Punch-Out!!* vibe...but that's about it for the highlights. The rest of the game, from the shallow fight mechanics to the load times to the bland backgrounds, is very mediocre. And it sports some of the worst character graphics I've ever seen—it's highly unlikely that *The Con* is progressive enough to feature transsexuals and more likely that the female character models are so poorly made that they look like men with long hair rather than women.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JENN F.	KATHLEEN	SCOOTER
	5.0	2.5	4.5

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Think and Feel
Players: 1 (2 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Teen

www.playstation.com

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KEYWORD: BIA

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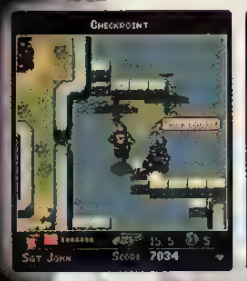

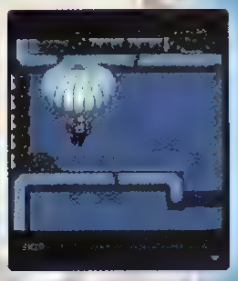

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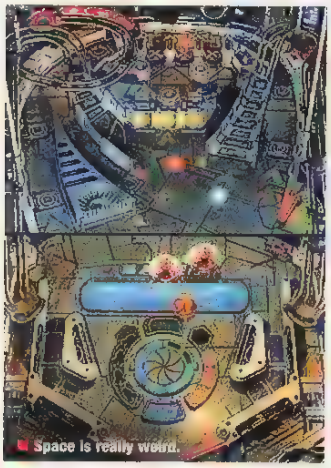
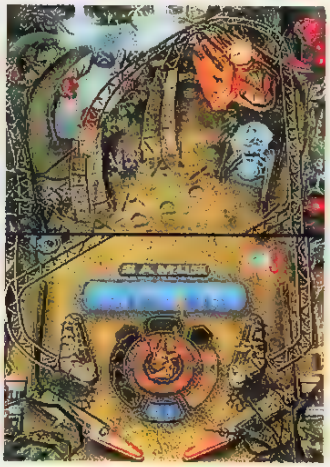
DS

METROID PRIME PINBALL

Full-tilt Samus


Space is really weird.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)		
7.5	7.0	8.0
ROBERT C	JEREMY	DAVID

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Fuse Games
Players: 1 (2-8 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com

Good: Good physics, good tables, solid pinball action
Bad: Eye-crossing headaches after an hour of play
Incredible Unforeseen Plot Twist: The pinball is a girl! A girl!

ROBERT C: I love pinball and while *Metroid Prime Pinball* hasn't changed my life, it has enough fun in it to hook me like a doughnut stuffed with fishhooks. The tables are smartly laid out with challenging but still makeable shots and lots of hectically fun multiball action, and the bonus tables you can travel to in Multiple Mission mode sport tough bosses that leave you satisfied when they die. I just wish more of the main-table minigames were as satisfying—I don't mind shooting moving targets in a pinball game, but I'd rather do it with the pinball, not a little guy with a gun.

My main knock against the game is that it can be hard to see the little rolled up Samus, uh, ball at times, particularly during boss fights when the big fellas and their minions are pelting you with rocks or rockets or blast waves or just negative thoughts, and extra particularly when the ball gets hung up in the dead zone between the upper and lower screens.

Headaches aside, this is a good game, including the wireless multiplayer which eschews the traditional highest-score model to crown the fastest player to hit a set score the winner.

1UP.COM—JEREMY: Playing through *Metroid* on NES years ago, I certainly never imagined there would come a day when I'd be flipping the normally dignified Samus Aran around a pinball table. Strange as it is, it's still pretty fun. As a silver-ball sim, *Prime Pinball* does the trick; the boards are involved but not ridiculously complex, and the special objectives are intuitive but challenging. The real selling point is the *Metroid Prime* connection, which (surprisingly) is handled tastefully. Missions require actual skill to defeat, and clever fan service like the wall jump mode and boss encounters make my fan-senses tingle.

POCKET GAMES—DAVID: Someone dropped the ball in failing to include a tilt feature, here—pinball's all about physics, and a subtle nudge or flick of the wrist can keep your game going for a few frantic minutes. That overt omission aside, this is a good-looking, great-playing test of skill perfectly suited to twin-screen play—the soundtrack and effects are topflight, too, and as with any good pinball game, what first feels chaotic comes to make perfect sense. *Metroid*'s deep-space-based sights, sounds, and signature motifs (missiles, morph balls, and bombs) are well implemented, and the addition of new modes (shooting sequences, boss fights) enhances the traditional pinball play. Think you're some sort of pinball wizard? This ought to be right up your alley.

DS

VIEWTIFUL JOE: DOUBLE TROUBLE

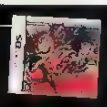
A touching take on a cult favorite

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)		
8.0	7.5	7.0
ROBERT A.	SHANE	MARK

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Clover Studio
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.capcom.com

Good: One-of-a-kind action gameplay...
Bad: ...That's pretty similar to the last two games
Dirty: Your DS screen after rubbing your greasy thumb on it



ROBERT A: It's always sad to see last year's innovator turn into this year's rehash, but in a gaming world ruled by sequels, it's an inevitability. Besides, sometimes we want more of the same. *Double Trouble* is the third *Viewtiful* game in as many years. If you haven't played the first two, the series is a modern update on the side-scrolling brawlers of yesteryear, employing all manner of flashy kung-fu-movie moves and head-scratching puzzles. *Double Trouble* does a pretty good job of walking the line between reheated leftovers and fresh meat.

The most compelling new additions revolve around the DS touch screen, which the game uses for various special moves. Unfortunately, these moves require touching the screen with your finger (instead of the stylus). When the need pops up mid-battle (say, using the "zoom" move by dragging your thumb across the screen), things can get hairy. Maybe it's the size of my fingers, but I often had to make two or three passes. These same moves, however, add new depth to familiar puzzles. And the action—impressively close to the GameCube original—remains top-notch.

SHANE: Neither a novelty nor a gimmicky nongame (cue my stern glance at *Nintendogs*), *Double Trouble* delivers a refreshingly solid, worthwhile action romp. Joe runs, jumps, punches, and defies the laws of physics just like in the console *VJ* titles, and a handful of new touch-panel VFX powers provide clever twists. (Although whoever thought it was easy to hold down the R button while rubbing the screen was dead wrong.) Also, *Joe*'s distinctive comic-strip art style migrates onto the DS with shocking ease, handily producing some of the best-looking 3D visuals (on both screens, no less) that the system's ever offered. Still, odds are you've seen most of *Joe*'s tricks before...even with the nifty DS powers and a new playable character (Joe's sis, Jasmine), this still feels awfully similar to *Joe*'s first outing.

MARK: You'd expect this pint-sized *Joe* to be a simplified version of his excellent full console outings—a more straightforward punch and kick affair—but it's actually quite the opposite. *Double Trouble* takes full advantage of Joe's unique powers and the DS' second touch screen for all sorts of devious puzzles. I loved figuring out which powers, and often combinations of powers, were required to continue, and the solutions always made good sense. But (maybe as a result) combat gets too little attention; beating up the bad guys quickly felt more repetitive than it ever did in the good ol' days. Still, it's a great-looking and entertaining action game that really makes use of the DS.

GBA

GUNSTAR SUPER HEROES

Were most GBA gamers even alive in 1993?

You can play the game as either Red or Blue, but they're both nearly identical.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.5	8.0	7.5
	ROBERT A.	SHANE	JEREMY

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Treasure
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.sega.com

Good: Classic gameplay intact
Bad: Classic ambition and creativity not
Rad: The remixed battle with transforming boss Seven Force

ROBERT A: *Gunstar Heroes* is one of those games that pops up in conversations between gamers like a secret handshake. Those in the know will tell you that the 1993 Sega Genesis classic is one of the best side-scrollers ever made—a nonstop barrage of bullets, bosses, and genre-busting innovations. After years of pleading on the part of *Gunstar* fans, developer Treasure bowed to demand, reassembled the original team, and casually chucked this sequel out of the office window.

Yes, *Gunstar Super Heroes* is a disappointment. Where the original boldly colored outside the lines of gaming convention, *Super Heroes* barely works up the energy to mimic its source material. It's a cover band, and fans are expected to nod their heads to the beat of nostalgia. When *Super Heroes* manages to veer off the familiar path, it does so with little purpose: useless hand-to-hand combat and uninspired vehicle-piloting sections.

Don't get me wrong, it's still plenty fun (see score). I was just hoping that *Super Heroes* would take a shot at the title. Instead, it makes one final appearance, an old has-been waving good-bye to the dwindling fans of a dying form.

SHANE: This sequel faces some astronomically lofty expectations. Unsurprisingly, it can't quite meet them. *Super Heroes* delivers the same brand of *Contra*-derived side-scrolling gunplay as its revered predecessor, but a few questionable tweaks—the omissions of weapon mixing and co-op play—dial down the intensity and complexity. Don't count it out, though. Even with these ill-advised changes, it's still one helluva game: Creative, unpredictable levels keep you on your toes, killer bosses pepper the levels, and impossibly good graphics erupt from your aging GBA. And hardcore classic gaming nerds will swoon over the numerous cameos and allusions to classic Sega titles.

1UP.COM—JEREMY: So which audience is developer Treasure trying to reach with *Gunstar Super Heroes*, exactly? It's hard to say. On one hand, it's packed with nods and references to the Genesis classic. On the other hand, it's more a remake than a sequel, yet lacks some of the defining features fans have come to associate with the *Gunstar* name. So old-schoolers are likely to find it something of a letdown, while newcomers won't appreciate its delicate subtleties. Fortunately, anyone and everyone can appreciate the amazing graphical tricks Treasure has pulled out of its hat. Does it live up to its legacy? Not really...but it sure is pretty.

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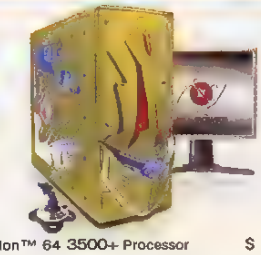
BACK TO SCHOOL 64

Silver
Yellow
Green
Blue
Black



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ZILLION FX

Silver
Yellow
Red
Blue
Titan

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REVIEWS WRAP-UP

The games that were too little...or too late

Half-Life 2

XB • Valve • ESRB: M

From its have-your-way-with-anything physics engine to its eerily lifelike dystopian cityscapes, *Half-Life 2* is a first-person shooter unlike anything else on the consoles. At least that's what we were ready to say about this mostly beautiful port of the PC hit, but one big concern held us back. The visuals kept bogging down, making for a sluggish play experience anytime we took on a sizeable squad of goons or manipulated too much stuff with the game's ultrafun junk-chucking gravity gun.

Thing is, developer Valve insists it will smooth out all such choppiness by the time the game ships in mid-November. That left us with a crisis: Should we publish our review of a not-quite-final game and trust that the graphics will be fixed, or do we hold off? Regular *EGM* readers can guess which direction we've taken.

We don't review games unless we're sure they represent the finished product, warts and all, so look for our full take on *Half-Life 2* next month. And if you read reviews of the game in other publications, approach their words with a dash of skepticism—they very well may have rated an incomplete version of the game.

Even if the final version of *Half-Life 2* ends up with choppy visuals, you'll likely love this game anyway. It oozes variety—from lengthy vehicle road trips to bug-based squad combat—but it's also marred by frequent load times (which won't be fixed in the finished game). If you've already played the much prettier PC version, however, walk on by. Seeing your beloved PC game remade for TV will probably just make you angry.

Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix 3

XB • Konami • ESRB: E — Yes, Konami is churning out updated versions of its dancing cash cow faster than even the most devout fans can keep up with, but it sure does pack in the content. *Ultramix 3* has an enormous number of play modes. And the song selection is downright hip, with tracks by the Clash, Blackalicious, and Basement Jaxx.

Bottom line: If you're still addicted to *DDR*, this is a huge dose.

Heroes of the Pacific

PS2/XB • Ubisoft • ESRB: T — A dubya-dubya-two shooter that starts in Pearl Harbor and follows the course of the war, *Heroes* emphasizes stimulating flight over realistic flight simulation, catapulting you into dogfights with more than 100 planes.

Bottom line: It's intense, beautiful, and a little frustrating in some protection missions (though you can call in your wingmates when it gets rough). Still, *Heroes* is one of the best air-combat shooters on the consoles.

Zoo Tycoon

DS • THQ • ESRB: E — In this port of the popular PC game, you'll have to not only play gracious host to your zoo patrons but also care for the animals. *Tycoon* obsesses over managing minute details, from the upkeep of zoo structures (wouldn't want your monkeys to escape) to the amount of shade your tiger gets.

Bottom line: If you find even just a little pleasure in balancing your checkbook, you might consider a career in zoo management.

NBA 06

PSP • Sony CEA • ESRB: E — We thought portable b-ball couldn't get any worse than last year's *NBA*. Well, we were totally wrong. Not only is shooting the rock still problematic, but *06* introduces new blunders such as players automatically picking up their dribble, and it's nearly impossible to steal the ball without committing a foul.

Bottom line: In the words of shot-blockers everywhere, "Get that s*** outta here!"

STUBBS THE ZOMBIE

XB • Aspyr • ESRB: M

Our copies of *Stubbs* arrived too late for a full review, but we've had a chance to play through a bit of this zombie role-reversal game, enough to impart the tangy flavor of brains and a few new insights. Like this one: *Stubbs* IS *Halo*. The connection between the two games has been well publicized (*Stubbs* is the product of rogue *Halo* team members), and the titles are as similar as you would think. Besides sharing roughly the same control scheme, *Stubbs* begins with the familiar control tutorial/battlefield tour. You'll get a few tips on the art of brain eating while munching through groups of cops (who behave much like the Covenant). Then later on, you'll get behind the wheel of the "Sod-O-Mobile," the game's version of *Halo*'s Warthog. We'll continue turning the living into the undead, but you'll have to wait until next issue for our final verdict.

ALSO REVIEWED ON 1UP.COM: Hallelujah for our website, where you'll find reviews of *Ultimate Spider-Man* (PS2/XB/GC), *Ghost in the Shell* (PSP), and other games that showed up too late or we didn't have the man-hours for.

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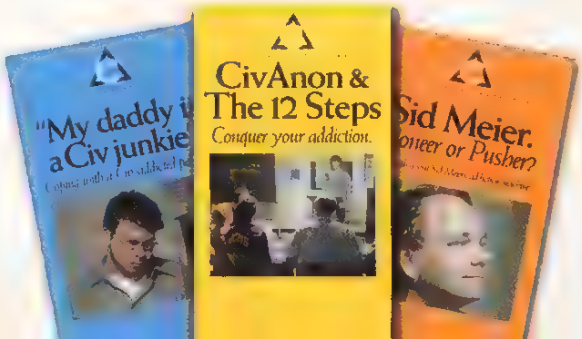
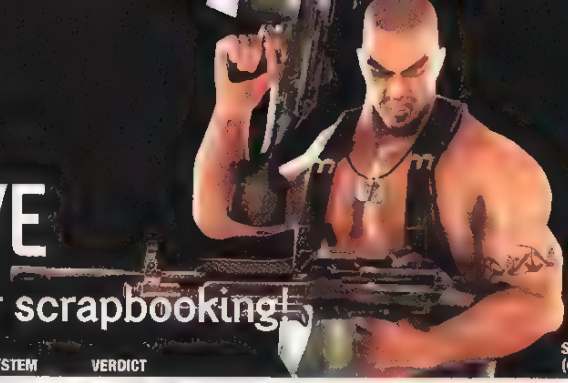


REVIEWS ARCHIVE

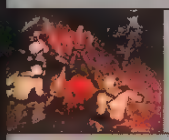
New tear-away page—ideal for scrapbooking!



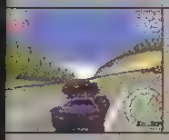
Crowe from *Far Cry Instincts* wants to know if you got tickets to the gun show

7.0 • 5.0 • 3.5

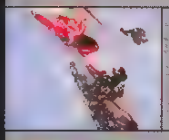
3.0 • 7.0 • 8.5



2.5 • 6.0 • 7.0



6.5 • 6.5 • 2.0



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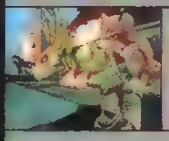

8.0 • 9.0 • 4.5

6.5 • 9.5 • 6.5

7.5 • 5.0 • 3.5

GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)	AWARD
187: Ride or Die	PS2/XB	Egregiously urban car-combat game that finds new ways to insult you at every turn	4.0 4.5 4.5	
Advance Wars: Dual Strike	DS	The DS is ideally suited for this addition to an awesomely addictive strategy series	9.0 8.5 9.0	Silver
Batman Begins	PS2/XB/GC	Superstar voiceovers and cool cars can't overcome dull game design	6.0 5.0 5.0	
Battalion Wars	GC	Cartoony real-time strategy-action shooter that's challenging and at times infuriating	6.0 6.5 7.0	
Beat Down: Fists of Vengeance	PS2/XB	A brawler with a good windup but lousy execution and no follow-through	4.5 4.0 4.5	
Burnout Legends	PSP	What sort of magiks shrink the big crashes and breakneck speed into the PSP?	8.5 9.0 9.0	Silver
Burnout Revenge	PS2/XB	The series that turned homicidal road rage into art brings home another delight	9.0 8.5 9.0	Silver
Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow	DS	Everything *Castlevania* should be: addictive, moody, great...and portable	9.5 9.0 8.5	Gold
Coded Arms	PSP	First-person shooting comes to PSP...then shoots itself in the foot with this crap	4.0 6.0 3.5	
Darkwatch	PS2	Good atmosphere, but otherwise a mundane cowboy-vampire shooter	6.0 6.5 6.0	
Darkwatch	XB	Better looking and online, but otherwise a mundane cowboy-vampire shooter	6.5 7.0 6.5	
Death, Jr.	PSP	A lousy camera and dull levels kill off any chance for fun this platformer ever had	4.0 6.0 4.0	
Devil Kings	PS2	An over-the-top, combo-driven battlefield brawler that repeats itself ad nauseam	8.0 8.0 8.5	Silver
Evil Dead Regeneration	PS2/XB	A cliché-ridden, repetitive, and annoying horror-adventure starring Bruce Campbell	5.5 4.5 6.5	
EyeToy: Play 2	PS2	Minigames that double as upper-body workouts. Hey, you're on the TV!	8.0 7.5 8.0	
Fantastic 4	PS2/XB/GC	Fantastic, eh? This brawler's a little out of itself if you ask us	6.0 4.0 7.0	
Far Cry Instincts	XB	A beautiful first-person shooter with lotsa guns and teeth but brain-dead enemies	8.0 8.0 6.5	
Frantix	PSP	A puzzle game with a balance of moderate mental stimulation and zero actual effort	7.0 7.0 6.0	
Fullmetal Alchemist 2	PS2	Diet *Kingdom Hearts*; with better RPGs to play, there is no excuse for less than great	5.0 [illegible] 6.0	
Genji: Dawn of the Samurai	PS2	Pretty, passionless Bushido-bladed action-adventure with a one-hit-kill gimmick	7.0 7.0 5.0	
GripShift	PSP	Ride your brake around ugly tracks and play with a track editor that isn't so awful	7.0 6.5 3.0	
The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	PS2/XB/GC	Go green and wreak havoc; explosive rage issues have never been more fun	9.0 7.5 9.0	Silver
Indigo Prophecy	PS2/XB	Unexpectedly smart murder-mystery game—mature movie-type adventure	9.0 8.5 8.5	Silver
Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes	[illegible]	This totally fugly action-strategy mix-up doesn't have the technical mettle to be good	5.0 6.5 5.0	
Lost in Blue	DS	A survive-on-a-desert-isle simulator, like *Sims: Cast Away Edition*, only no Wilson	7.0 7.0 7.5	
Lunar: Dragon Song	DS	Pretty graphics can't make up for an outdated RPG that's slow and cruel	3.0 4.5 6.5	
Madden NFL 06	PS2/XB/GC	The passing game is now overly complex, but *Madden* is still All-Pro	8.5 9.0 9.5	Gold
Madden NFL 06	PSP	Apparently, making mighty *Madden* tiny increases load times substantially	7.0 7.0 9.0	
Makai Kingdom	PS2	Hardcore tactical-RPG fans will love this like they love obsessive organizing	7.5 8.0 7.5	
Mario Superstar Baseball	GC	A steep learning curve keeps Mario and crew short of the majors	7.5 7.0 7.5	
Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects	PS2/XB/GC	Imperfect is right. Just a mediocre button masher with no-name heroes	5.0 4.0 7.5	
Medievil Resurrection	PSP	A frighteningly unfunny action-adventure game that might help you kill a few hours	6.0 8.0 4.5	
Meteos	DS	Who knew a puzzle game in which you rub space rocks would be so addictive?	9.0 9.0 9.0	Gold
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	PSP	Long load times keep the tiny version of *Midnight Club* out of pole position	7.0 8.5 7.5	
Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	PS2/XB	A good action-adventure spin-off with a solid fighting system	7.5 [illegible] 7.5	
MotoGP 3	XB	Intense, technical, hardcore bike racing—just like in the last one	7.5 8.0 7.5	
MVP Baseball 2005	PS2/XB/GC	Slick minigames help make this the best hardball sim yet	8.5 8.5 9.0	Silver
Namco Museum Battle Collection	PSP	Easily one of the best classic-game compilations ever, plus it's portable	8.0 7.0 8.0	
Nanostray	DS	This 2D shooter excels at being perfectly mediocre	5.0 5.0 5.0	
NASCAR 06: Total Team Control	PS2/XB	Good fun for those who love to talk to their game while driving in circles	9.0 7.0 6.5	
NBA 2K6	PS2/XB	*2K*'s beautiful comeback drives it down the lane and takes it to the hole	8.5 8.5 8.5	Silver
NBA Live 06	PS2/XB/GC	Easily the prettiest baller we've seen during this round of consoles	7.0 8.0 7.0	
NCAA March Madness	PS2/XB	A new defensive play-calling system makes lockdown D a reality	7.5 [illegible] 8.5	Silver
NHL 06	PS2/XB/GC	EA's hockey series finally battles its way back to respectability...	7.0 7.5 7.5	
NHL 2K6	PS2/XB	...while shoddy goalies let the 2K Games team down	7.5 7.0 6.0	
Nintendogs	DS	Who doesn't love walking, playing with, and training puppies? Serial killers	7.5 8.0 9.0	Silver
Pac'N Roll	DS	An entertaining but ultimately soulless and occasionally aggravating platformer	7.5 8.5 6.5	
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	DS	A lawyer simulator that is clever and involved but litigiously nasty and repetitive	7.0 6.5 8.5	
PoPoLoCrois	PSP	This repackaged roleplayer puts the "old" back in "old school"	5.0 5.5 6.5	
Radiata Stories	PS2	A witty but poky and slapped-together RPG	7.5 7.5 7.5	
Shadow of the Colossus	PS2	A soulful, thrilling, and inventive action game whose reach exceeds its grasp	[illegible] 8.5 9.0	Silver
Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga 2	PS2	A sleek, smart, and addictive RPG that gives cosplayers cause to commit cannibalism	8.5 8.0 8.0	Silver
Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves	PS2	An entertaining mix of stealth and action in this platformer will steal...*your heart!*	8.0 8.0 8.5	Silver
Sonic Gems Collection	GC	Plural form is misleading—the only gem is *Sonic CD*, which is the best *Sonic* to date	6.5 5.5 6.5	
Spartan: Total Warrior	PS2/XB/GC	Gladiator-themed epic battles and a blah story round out this action game	7.5 9.0 8.0	Silver
Spider-Man 2	DS	If your spider sense is on the fritz, let us warn you to avoid this ho-hum adventure	6.0 5.5 3.0	
Splinter Cell Chaos Theory DS	DS	Let's just try to forget this game ever happened	1.5 4.5 5.5	
The Suffering: Ties That Bind	PS2/XB	A creepy but cheap survival-horror game with a thin story and a dirty mouth	7.5 8.0 7.5	
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06	PS2/XB/GC	It's grrreat! A new putting system relieves typical golf-game tedium	9.0 8.0 7.5	Silver
Trace Memory	[illegible]	A point-and-click adventure that doesn't manage to include any actual adventure	5.5 6.5 6.5	
Trauma Center: Under the Knife	DS	This innovative supernatural surgery action game can be a bit too unforgiving	7.5 8.0 6.0	
Urban Reign	PS2	Generic, patchy combat and no co-op put a wicked ugly shiner on this brawler	7.5 5.0 3.5	
Viewtiful Joe 2	PS2/GC	More of what you (hopefully) know and (should) love from Joe's first outing	8.0 8.0 8.5	Silver
Virtua Tennis: World Tour	PSP	World tour mode is tedious, but smart A.I. and fun multiplayer make it worthwhile	6.0 8.0 8.0	
We ♥ Katamari	PS2	This game has huge balls	8.5 8.0 8.0	Silver
WWE Day of Reckoning 2	GC	We reckon there isn't much to say about an average wrestling game	5.0 5.0 7.5	

*Games in red are previous Game of the Month winners.

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9/10, "Buy or Die" Award PSM

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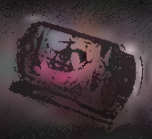

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we actually had to tone down seanbaby's where's-the-beef references

SEANBABY'S I HATE THE 1984s

Looking back through crap-colored glasses

Blame Furby on this a**hole.

When I think of the worst year for videogames, I think of the year 1572, when Mr. T's Time Team and I were captured by chrono pirates and locked in a star cell with nothing to play except *Bun Runner* on Teen Wolf's signal watch. But a close second for my least favorite videogame year is 1984, when America "Footloose'd" along with Kenny Loggins as he got footloose—and then ran panicked while cursing God along with Michael Jackson as his head was engulfed in flames. Clara Peller wanted to know, "Where's the beef?" and while Andy Kaufman was maybe faking his own death, the game industry's twitching corpse was very real.

The apocalyptic wasteland of consoles

Scientists have several theories for why the console industry nearly died in 1984. Some say the culture was moving away from electronic entertainment to focus more on finding the beef. Others say consoles struggled because computer floppy disks held hundreds of times more information than cartridges, but that's useless to bring up since that explanation is for nerds, and they would have claimed to have already known it anyway. The real reason is that no one had spent more than 12 hours designing an Atari 2600 game since the Chuck Wagon dog food–inspired *Chase the Chuck Wagon* (which was almost named *Dog Food LaserQuest*, *Adventurin' In My Own Gravy*, and for unknown reasons, *Phil Collins: Mouth Full of Balls Racing*).

Games released in the post-*E.T.*-landfill era were done so more out of stubbornness than for entertainment purposes, since no gamers would have wanted these titles even if they did remember where they put their 2600s.

GRAPHICS GO ON STRIKE

Up N' Down • Atari 2600

Up N' Down is a bad-graphics simulator with a heart of gold and a car-hopping theme. The player pilots what can only be described as a hmrphlorp up two criss-crossing roads. Imagine if you were born with flippers and had to cry for help, but you could only communicate via Etch-A-Sketch—your game would probably look like this blockenstein's monster. But the real story of the game's design process is even stranger. Since all the graphic designers in 1984 had gone on to the lucrative field of where's-the-beef potholdery (see figure 67), a bold, new design process was employed: A fat kid ate 9 pounds of Legos and then received a swift kick in his stupid, fat stomach. The kick and the stomach went on to direct a spin-off TV series called *The World of Up N' Down: Check Out What This Fat Kid Ate!*

Figure 67: A pot holder asks questions no man can answer.

Photographs by Getty

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SEANBABY (CONT.)

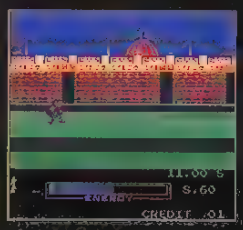
Get 'em wet, feed 'em after midnight—these gremlins still won't tell where the damn beef is.

HORROR IN THE ARCADES

Since consoles were too close to not existing to actually suck, arcade games did their best to pick up the slack. Here are three of the worst...

Snacks N' Jackson

In this game, you play the part of a clown's head attached to a 4-foot tentacle neck. Your nose detaches itself from your face, and it's the rest of your clown face's job to keep it from bouncing through the window behind you. Also, you have to tentacle your head around to eat levitating breakfast foods. The strange name *Snacks N' Jackson* was a last-minute replacement of the original title, *What Hitler Sees When He Closes His Eyes*.



Herbie Goes to the Olympics

This would be a standard track and field game, only Herbie is a hunchback. It's so bad I started inventing anti-hunchback stereotypes just so I could hate it more. But all that did was make it so now I think some game sucks AND that soup squirts out of those people's humps when you kick them in the stomach. Sorry, I've just been a little fixated on kicks to the stomach lately; it's a phase I go through.

The Guiness

This is a Japanese game (called *Strength & Skill* in the U.S.) based on setting world records—exciting world records in events like log sawing and peg hammering. I'm fine with this stupid variation on button-mashing, but how do you make a game about world records and leave out fattest twins on tiny bikes or most bees in some crazy jerk's mouth? It's like making a game about hunchbacks and not bringing up how they can't keep a job. And if you don't like me talking about them that way, why don't you go do what they do and dip your feet in fish juice to trap and shave cats? Damn hunchbacks.

CRAPPY GAMES ABOUT GREMLINS

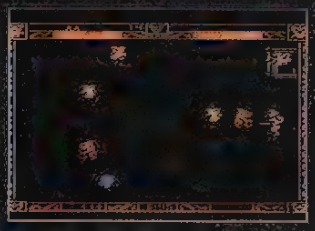
From top to bottom: gremlins, chick who catches gremlins, and the beef.

Gremlins (Atari 2600)

The object here is to protect a row of cheeseburgers on a sidewalk from gremlins. How and why you were put in charge of this duty isn't clear—I really don't remember this part of the movie. It's possible that this is a clumsily rearranged Hamburglar game, or maybe the developers never expected it to be scrutinized by someone with my knowledge of where cheeseburgers are stored. Either way, it is your job to catch falling gremlins in a paper cup. Why a paper cup? Because if no one's going to play the thing, a paper cup is the easiest thing to draw. You're lucky the game isn't just a middle finger and a fart sound, like *Strawberry Shortcake's Musical Matchups*.

Gremlins (Atari 5200)

This version is more faithful to the movie, but here's an excerpt from the instruction manual: "Billy cages the Mogwai in his living room, but they break out for a midnight snack. As the game opens things look really grim—or is that grem?" Things look grem?! How does the person responsible for writing that live with himself? It's not a joke—it's not even a pun. If there's any justice in the world, the person who wrote this manual is currently chained to an operating table and having his ears filled with insects that only scream descriptions of *That's So Raven* valentines.



Things are looking GREM!

"Reeeiiiiikk! This one says 'Oh snap! You've got MALL my heart, Valentine!' next to a picture of a shopping bag! Raven looks on from the top of the card, with hate in her eyes!"

Photographs by Hutton Archive/Fotos International

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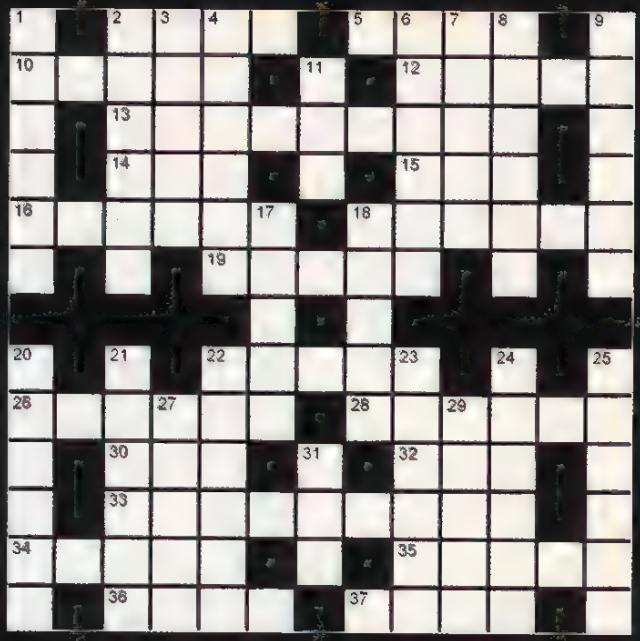
NO NEW CONSOLES!

(Solution on page 196)



ACROSS

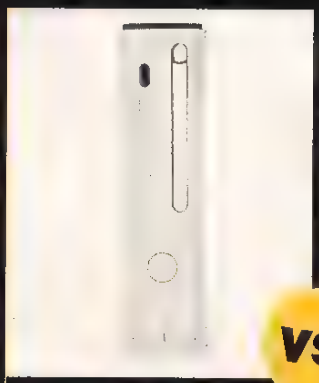
2. *Ikari Warriors* resurrection code
5. Skellington of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*
10. *God of War* soundtrack instrument
12. D-pad depressor
13. Guile's *Street Fighter* specialty
14. Game over?
15. Xbox launch year (Roman)
16. EyeToy is very much this kind of camera
18. Sneak
19. Britney's *Taiko* song
22. *Champion* or *Yeti*
26. *Elevator Action* stop-offs
28. *Mega Man 5* missile "Man"
30. Solid Snake's series, for short
32. Turn, or attempt
33. *Halo 2* cannon
34. Genesis' Little Mermaid
35. In games, X-Men are children of one of these
36. Late-'90s *EGM* icon
37. Unidentified online gamer?

DOWN

1. Offensive option
2. Like online play from the original *Halo*?
3. You need a code to see it in Genesis' *Mortal Kombat*
4. Similar to a *Mario* Shyguy
6. Cryptic N64 controller color: _ purple
7. *Mario* world's tethered perennial
8. Unique *Virtua Fighter 4* game mode
9. *Prisoner of War* Sergeant Jimmy
11. Samus' chilly *Metroid* beam
17. Key objectives?
18. *Military Madness* heavyweight tank
20. How you want your ship to stay in *Sid Meier's Pirates!*
21. Enemy to *Resident Evil's* Leon
22. Nemesis of 34 ACROSS
23. *Castlevania: Circle of the Moon* vampire slayer
24. *Tecmo Super Bowl* running back Bear
25. Atari 2600 tank shooter *Armor*
27. *Onimusha* clan
29. Mega Man's brother "Man"
31. Flying *Metroid* baddie

GRUDGE MATCH

Get your priorities straight



XBOX 360 vs. **MAKING RENT**

Ah, the holidays are nigh upon us. Which, of course, means it's time to decide how you're going to fund that Xbox 360 console you'll be buying after the holiday bank-account drainage. Maybe the landlord can wait until the new year, but will it be worth it?

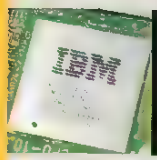
COMFORTS

Xbox 360	Making Rent
Controller actually fits in your hands this time!	Roof over your head, shower, electricity **Advantage: Rent**

DEPOSIT

Xbox 360	Making Rent
Goes toward final purchase on delivery **Advantage: Xbox 360**	Won't be refunded once they see what you did to the bathroom

ARCHITECTURE



Xbox 360	Making Rent
Three 3.2GHz processors **Advantage: Xbox 360**	Stucco exterior gives rats something to climb

SOCIAL LIFE

Xbox 360	Making Rent
You can always hang out with your Xbox Live buddies	Chicks dig guys who...live somewhere **Advantage: Rent**

DECOR

Xbox 360	Making Rent
Removable faceplate lets you change the 360's look with your mood swings **Advantage: Xbox 360**	Place to hang your *Duke Nukem* poster

INVESTMENT POTENTIAL

Xbox 360	Making Rent
At least a few bucks profit on eBay **Advantage: Xbox 360**	Only if you wanna buy the building

WINNER: XBOX 360

Shuffle off those adult responsibilities—a new console makes everything better. And worst case, you can sell it to finance something new from Sony or Nintendo down the line!

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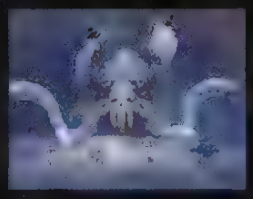

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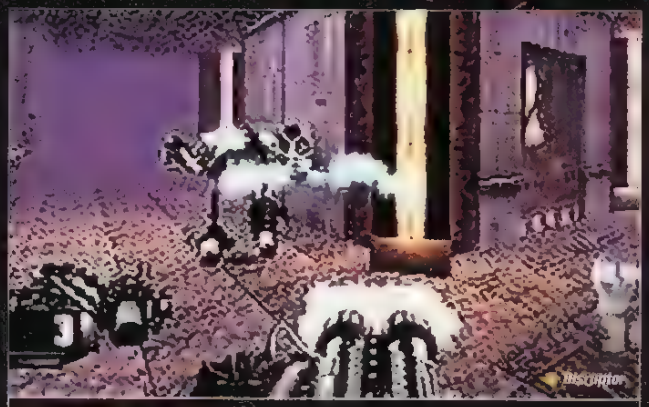
PlayStation 2

EGM RETRO: BEFORE THEY WERE FAMOUS II

The story of the PS2's big guns—back when they were just little ones

The PlayStation family has been home to a lot of great software over the years, but a trio of developers have made names for themselves as true powerhouses of great gameplay for Sony's hardware. Insomniac (of *Ratchet & Clank* fame), Naughty Dog (maker of the *Jak* series), and Sucker Punch (which brings you *Sly Cooper*) put out solid sequels year after year—just check out the Reviews section in this issue and the last one. We take a look at the minds behind the PS2's top mascot franchises...*before* they were famous.

—*Jeremy Parish*


Disruptor

Way of the Warrior

NAUGHTY DOG

Famous: Naughty Dog hit it big with *Crash Bandicoot*, a PS1 platformer that managed to compete with *Super Mario 64* (N64) in terms of both sales and critical acclaim. In fact, the *Crash* series was so good that Sony made Naughty Dog a part of its corporate empire a few years back, paving the way for a steady stream of increasingly edgy *Jak* games.

Before: Naughty Dog started its life with the rather uninspiring name of JAM Software. (Founder Jason Rubin explained this poor choice with the only acceptable defense imaginable: "It was the '80s.") It was their successful *Mortal Kombat* clone *Way of the Warrior* for the ultra-expensive 3DO console that caught the attention of gamers.

Did You Know? The company's Genesis debut, a role-playing game called *Ring of Power*, featured scandalous naughtiness in the form of a nekkid woman whose private parts could be displayed for all to see by inputting a certain secret code on the title screen.

INSOMNIAC

Famous: *Spyro the Dragon* is proof positive that the original PlayStation can push a free-roaming 3D *Mario*-style platformer with as much aplomb as the Nintendo 64 itself. These days, Insomniac digs stretching out a little more with the *Ratchet & Clank* games, which are consistently hailed as some of the best action titles around, thanks in large part to the developer's willingness to bend genre boundaries.

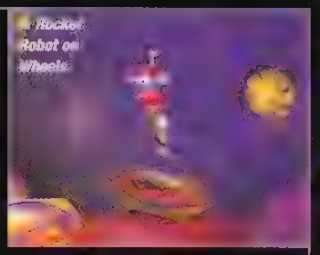
Before: Actually, Insomniac got off to a solid start; the company's first game was the PS1 first-person shooter *Disruptor*, which was beloved by critics and gamers alike. Although the game comes off as a little simple in the post-*Halo* era, it was pretty posh for its time.

Did You Know? Insomniac hasn't strayed too far from its roots—*Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal* can actually be played as a first-person shooter, and the company's upcoming PlayStation 3 title *I-8* is a straight-up return to *Disruptor* territory.

SUCKER PUNCH

Famous: Sucker Punch commands a small but satisfied following thanks to its superlative *Sly Cooper* series. Part platformer, part stealth-action, part goofball minigame collection, the *Sly* package is made all the better by the series' endearing characters (though we're sort of creeped out by those guys who like Carmelita Fox a little *too* much).

Before: Shock of shocks, Sucker Punch actually got its start working for the enemy; the company's debut was *Rocket: Robot on Wheels* for Nintendo 64. While it earned respectable scores, *Rocket* was lost amidst a flood of largely identical 3D plaformers for the console. It wasn't until *Sly*'s combination of old-school challenge and newfangled graphics arrived that folks took notice of the developer's knack for creating great games.


Rocket: Robot on Wheels

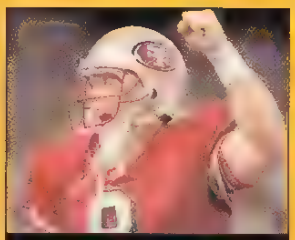
Did You Know? An homage to Sucker Punch's roots can be found in *Sly 2*—inside a glass case in the opening museum stage you can spot Rocket, the eponymous robot on wheels. It's even possible to smash him to pieces for a few coins, but you'd have to be awfully heartless to do that.

OLD SCHOOL

10 years ago in EGM

On the Cover: Alien Trilogy
We put one of our favorite matinee idols on the cover: Alien from the first-person shooter *Alien Trilogy* (PS1/Saturn).

Game of the Month: Twisted Metal (PS1)
This game earned top honors from the *EGM* Review Crew for its innovative combo of car combat and evil clowns. And really, who wouldn't enjoy crashing ice cream trucks into friends?



Talkin' Videogames... Sort of
EGM's resident sportaholics scored an interview with 49ers star Steve Young...but failed to ask him a single game-related question. Luckily, the now Hall of Famer happened to mention that he played the arcade shooter *Zaxxon* as a kid. Whew....

Mortal Mania
Yes, we were totally obsessed with *Mortal Kombat*, but wasn't everyone back then? Hence the reason for interviewing the creators of this oh-so-controversial fighting franchise, Ed Boon and John Tobias.

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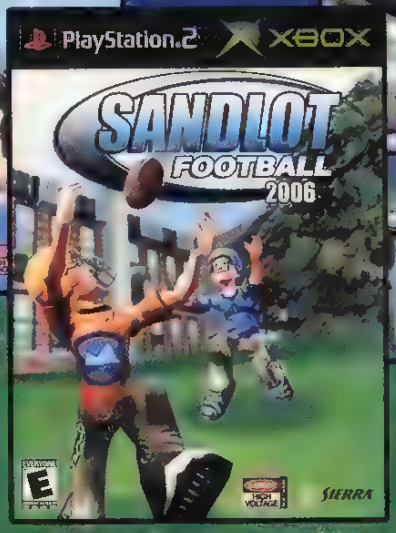

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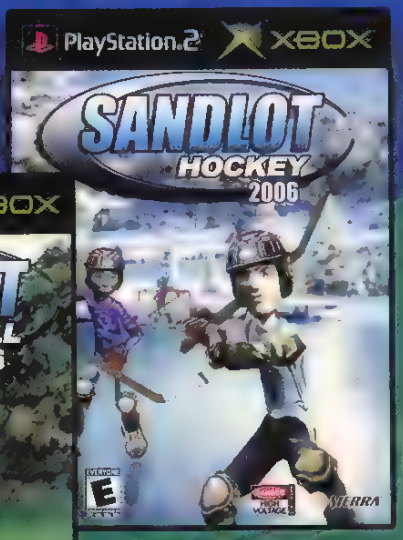

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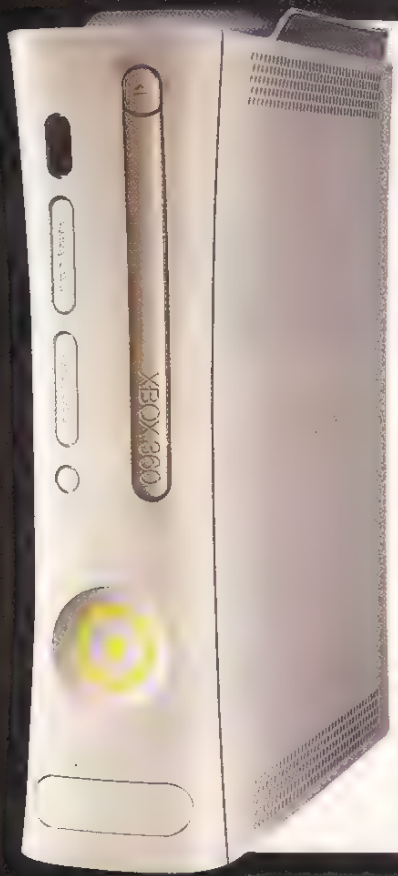

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NEXT MONTH: JANUARY • ISSUE #199

ON SALE DECEMBER 6

2006 A YEAR IN PREVIEW

Gaze into our crystal balls...

We've given up sleep, family, friends, food, and personal hygiene to take stock of the glut of gaming goods coming at you in 2006.

Our January issue is going to be abso-freaking-lutely silly with previews. It's a goddamn preview apocalypse around here. No game is safe from our eager probing! Next-gen and current-gen games will be carefully picked apart by the evil scientists here at the world-renowned *EGM* labs. We're carefully researching anything that even thinks it's coming out in 2006, like the elusive ***Metal Gear Solid 4*** for the PS3. We're also peeking in on the current condition of highly anticipated titles like ***Kingdom Hearts II*** and ***Okami*** for PS2. Find out if games like these can keep current-gen gaming love alive—or at least on life support.

If you're more of a living-in-the-now type, you'll enjoy our reviews of all the Xbox 360 launch titles. We're putting that fancy new console through its paces in the company of beauty Joanna from ***Perfect Dark Zero*** and that beast from ***Peter Jackson's King Kong***. Which one is the beast? Mr. Jackson or that big gorilla? You'll have to tune in to find out!

Speaking of Xbox 360—are you the only cat on your block without one? Just when you thought we couldn't be more wonderful and giving, we trot out the free stuff! We'll offer you one final chance at winning the **Ultimate Xbox 360 Giveaway** (page 194)...and at becoming the person your parents always dreamed you'd be.

PREVIEWS

- Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter (XB360)
- Tomb Raider: Legend (XB360/PS2/XB)
- Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams (PS2)
- Final Fantasy XII (PS2)
- The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess (GC)

REVIEWS

- Perfect Dark Zero (XB360)
- Peter Jackson's King Kong (XB360/XB/PS2/GC)
- Call of Duty 2 (XB360)
- Stubbs the Zombie in Rebel Without a Pulse (XB)
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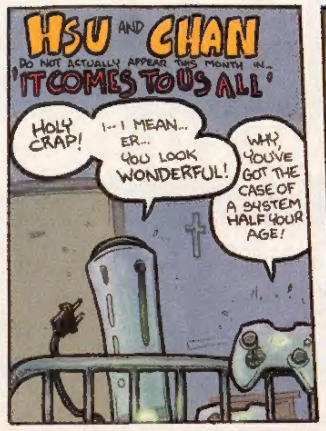

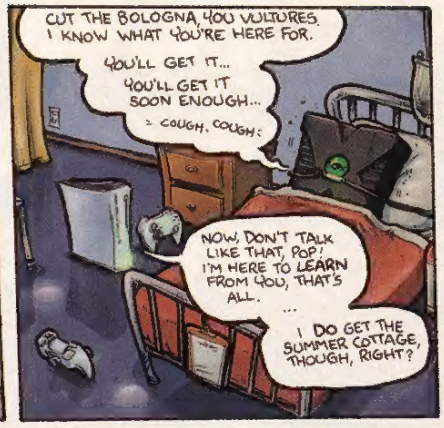

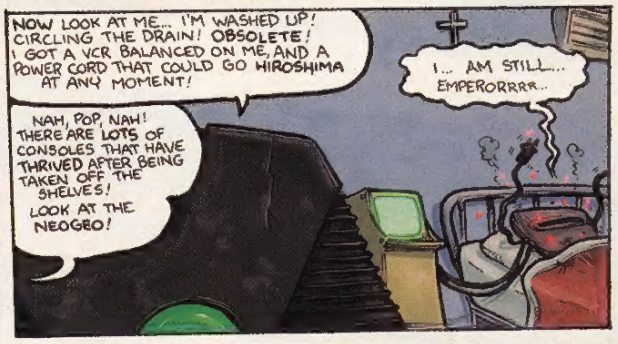

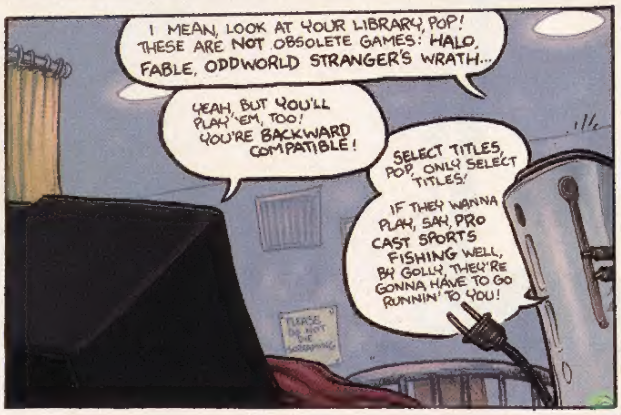

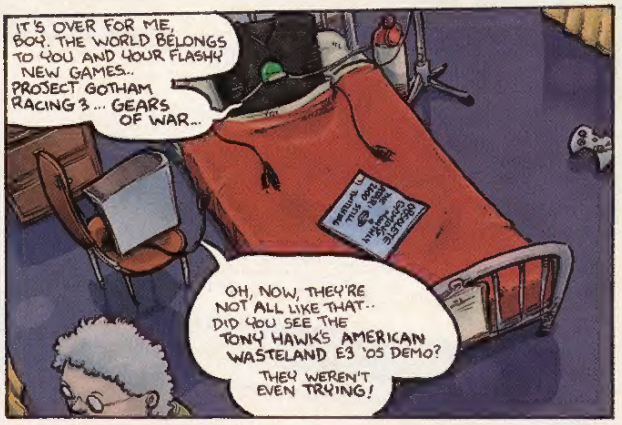

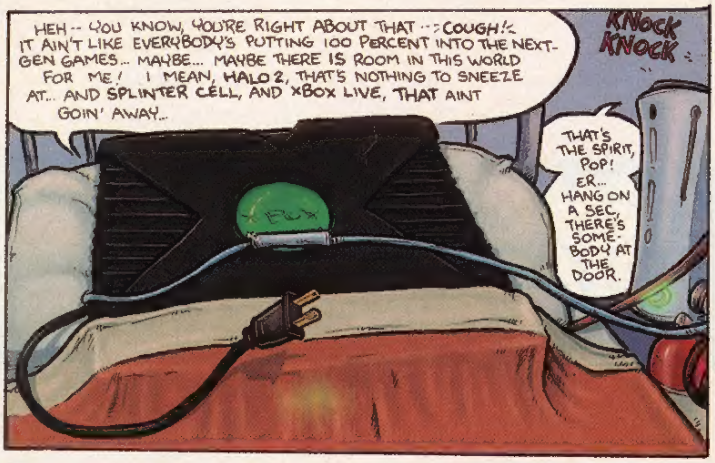

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